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The RING

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BEST I FACED: THOMAS "THE HITMAN" HEARNS

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OPENING SHOT

Deontay Wilder has reason to be pumped after his 10th-round knockout of Luis Ortiz (right): He's now one step away from fighting Anthony Joshua for a megabucks payday and a shot at becoming undisputed heavyweight champion. (Photo by Timothy A. Clary)

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

I am so glad to see that Roy Jones has FINALLY called it a day. He should have retired after his epic win over John Ruiz in 2003. I had intended on flying to see Roy boxing in the flesh (Jones won a 10-round unanimous decision over Scott Sigmon in Pensacola, Florida, on February 8), but didn't want to support the fight. I remember going to the last fights of Tommy Hearns and Roberto Duran when ethically I shouldn't have. I hope that Roy can maintain his health in retirement. At his prime, Roy was the greatest fighter I ever saw; his skills were sublime. He was my Fighter of the Year for many years. Mayweather ended his career in the highest-earning fight of all time against a debutante fighter, whereas Roy ended his legendary career on a club show. Weird.

Mike Hills
Glenwood Springs, Colo.

TEAM EUBANK STANK

I really felt let down by Chris Eubank Jr.'s loss to George Groves, because I believe Eubank could do much better. But Groves is now a bigger fighter and hits harder than in the past, and he had better experience. Eubank must go back to middleweight and, most of all, get rid of the group around him – including his dad – because they played their part in a clueless game plan. I think that is what annoyed me most. Shane MacGuigan is streets ahead of the Eubank team. It is curtains now, so to speak, for the big fights some of us thought Eubank could handle. Not taking anything away from Groves, but the reality is that he still got caught a few too many times and there is still vulnerability. My opinion is that when he comes up against a big puncher, the result will be similar to the punch Carl Froch destroyed him with. I take nothing away from him, but we shouldn't get carried away, either! I ended up not being convinced by either of them, long-term.

Ray Fox
Keighley, England

CORRECTIONS: In the May issue of THE RING on page 6, the scrambled caption should've identified Gennady Golovkin (left) and Canelo Alvarez. On page 45, the photo meant to show Ryuya Yamanaka is actually a photo of Tatsuya Fukuhara. Yamanaka is pictured below.

WRITE TO THE RING!

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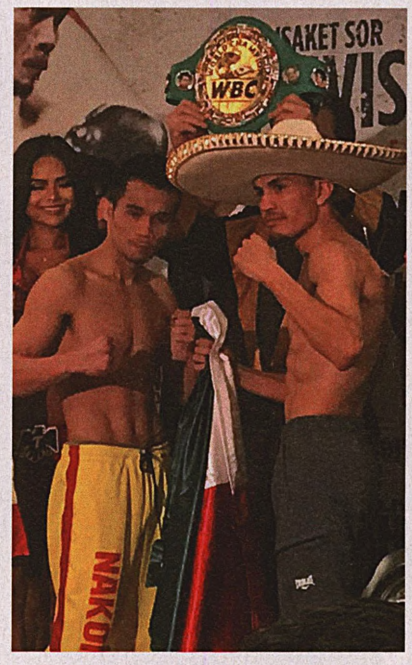

'SUPERFLY' SOARS AGAIN

HBO's "Superfly 2" turned out to be a great night of boxing. The commentating was a bit one-sided, but the fights themselves made up for that. Glad to see Donnie Nietes finally get some exposure in the U.S.; he's one of the best-kept secrets in boxing. The main event between Juan Francisco Estrada and Srisaket Sor Rungvisai is an early candidate for Fight of the Year. I'd hate to be a judge in any of their fights. I scored it a draw. Resembles the Pacquiao vs. Marquez fights. They may have to fight four times to settle things. Good to see the lighter weight classes get some exposure. More please!

Victor Rivero
Pacifica, Calif.

TWEET OF THE MONTH

Boss Man @BobArum and @VasylLomachenko ringside--in the rain--for #ValdezQuigg.

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Pictured left to right: Damon Allen Jr., Jessie Vargas, Fernando Vargas

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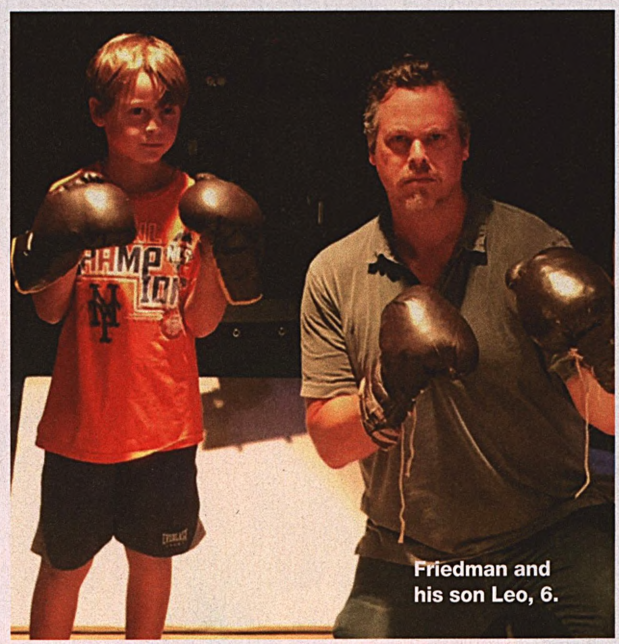
LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

BY STEFAN FRIEDMAN



Friedman and his son Leo, 6.

Dear RING Magazine Reader,

It is my honor and privilege to write to you today as the new publisher of THE RING Magazine.

Having gotten to know RING Magazine Editor-in-Chief Doug Fischer and many of the talented Ring writers and staff through my work with Golden Boy Promotions over the last few years, I am fully confident that we are poised to successfully transform RING Magazine into a 21st-century media publication.

With that said, there is a flawed theory currently circulating that I want to address from the top:

During my five years of being intimately involved with the sport of boxing, I have repeatedly heard that the sport is dying.

During my more than two decades around journalism, I have repeatedly heard that print reporting is dying, too.

Though uttered often, neither of these statements is true.

What is accurate, however, is that both the sport and the medium that THE RING uses to cover it exist amid sea changes that have – and will continue to – force both to adapt.

In boxing, the competition for fans and their dollars has steadily increased over the decades not just with the advent of mixed martial arts, WWE and other combat sports, but as sports like basketball have gained in popularity and commensurate television time.

Meanwhile, the digitalization of content and explosion of social media have forced a transformation in media the likes of which we haven't seen at least since the advent of television and quite possibly since the day Gutenberg launched his printing press more than 550 years ago.

What both these challenges have in common, however, is that they can be met with a rather simple solution.

Know what the customer wants and give it to them.

Just as it is the job of fight promoters to give the fans the fight they want to see and thereby effectively compete with other offerings, it is our job to understand that a print magazine can no longer itself sustain a media business.

That's why as we continue to print the bible of boxing, we will simultaneously look to utilize digital assets – video, in particular – to complement what you see in the hard copies of the magazine.

Will we get things wrong? Of course we will. But I am positive we will get more things right, so long as we understand what it is that you, the customer, want to see, hear and read.

It is in that spirit that I welcome you to get in touch with me at any time to discuss the fight game, journalism, both or neither at friedman@ringtv.com

Until then, I'll see you at the fights.

— SF

ANOTHER DAY IN BOXING

Larry Merchant wasn't exaggerating when he called boxing "the theater of the unexpected."

Just when you think you know the sport well enough to anticipate what happens next, it throws you a crazy curveball. That unpredictability is what makes boxing dramatic, fun, special.

It's also what makes it a royal pain in the ass to cover – especially with a print publication. The issue you now hold in your hands was supposed to feature a Richard Slone painting of Canelo Alvarez and Gennady Golovkin squaring off for their big rematch on May 5 at T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas.

My boyhood idol, Sugar Ray Leonard, was our guest editor. Who better to comment on legacy-making return bouts? Leonard's description of his mindset going into his own legendary rematches with Roberto Duran and Thomas Hearns, and his thoughts on what Alvarez and Golovkin need to do in their second go-around, was presented in this Ringside column and it served as the core of a brilliant cover story penned by associate editor Tom Gray.

We had many excellent Canelo-Golovkin-related features lined up for you, dear readers. And beyond the editorial content, we had grand plans for the marketing of the special superfight preview issue. It was going to be everywhere in Las Vegas. Fans were going to be greeted by life-sized cutouts of Canelo and GGG holding this magazine outside the gift shops at McCarran International Airport!

We couldn't wait for this issue to hit newsstands in late April. We were going to have record sales, we were sure of it! And that enthusiasm powered us through a short production cycle, kept us going without sleep for two days before literally making the printer's deadline with not one minute to spare on Friday, March 23.

And less than two hours later, news of Alvarez's temporary suspension by the Nevada Athletic Commission as the result of his two positive tests for the banned substance clenbuterol hit social media. It hit us like a brick to the face.

Alvarez, who claimed to have ingested the clenbuterol from tainted beef while in Mexico in February, was scheduled to explain the "adverse analytical findings," as commission executive director Bob Bennett put it, at an April 10 hearing.

While cynical fans immediately took to Twitter to proclaim that the NAC meeting was a mere formality because Sin City will green-light anything that brings in the big bucks, industry insiders knew that the fight was in real jeopardy.

So, we had a choice to make: Let the magazine be printed as it was, or read the writing that was on the wall and "stop the presses" like in those old-time newspaper movies. We put our heads together with publisher Stefan Friedman and decided to sub out all that wonderful Canelo-Golovkin content for new material.

Thankfully, we had a small window of time (one week) to get this done. And though we had to hustle like crazy, we were fortunate to have contacted the printers before they began converting our files to hard copy, and even luckier that a dream fight had recently been scheduled one week after Canelo-GGG 2 was to take place – the May 12 showdown between RING lightweight champ Jorge Linares and 2017 Fighter of the Year Vasyl Lomachenko.

Linares-Lomachenko is not the mega-event the middleweight championship rematch was to be, but it's worthy of THE RING's cover, and both fighters and their management graciously cooperated with our last-minute interview requests.

Is this issue going to sell like the original June 2018 edition? Probably not. But we're delivering another quality magazine that hardcore fans will appreciate, and it was important for us to stay on our 12-issues-a-year schedule for our subscribers, old and new.

Enjoy the Linares-Lomachenko stories and the other features in this issue. We'll bring you another quality magazine next month – just don't ask me to predict who will be on the cover. RING

RICHARD T. STONE

ROUND 1

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH ★ ES ★ AND MORE!

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH

OSCAR VALDEZ was already considered one of boxing's more valiant world titleholders based on hard-fought, back-to-back victories against Miguel Marriaga and Genesis Servania, but his blood-and-guts encounter with Scott Quigg on a rainy March 10 evening at the outdoor StubHub Center venue in Carson, California, proved the WBO featherweight beltholder's uncommon mettle beyond any doubt. First, Valdez agreed to face Quigg after the English veteran missed weight by two-and-a-half pounds. Then Valdez insisted – against the better judgment of his manager, Frank Espinoza – that the fight would go on after Quigg skipped a day-of weigh-in meant to limit how many pounds the Brit put on. Finally, Valdez and a 142-pound Quigg (he stepped on the scale for ESPN) duked it out for 12 punishing rounds. Valdez, who won a unanimous decision, fought with a broken jaw from Round 4 on. The post-fight plan was for the jaw to be wired for six weeks and then for Valdez to take a long, deserved rest.

MIKEY WILLIAMS/TOP RANK

ADVANCED DEGREES

Degrees of separation between fighters of the past and their more contemporary counterparts. With the lightweight clash between Jorges Linares and Vasyl Lomachenko approaching, regular AD guru Gregg Morgan connected the first RING champion at 135 pounds (Barney Ross) to the current one (Linares) in just nine steps. Ross held the title in 1933.

Barney Ross fought

Henry Armstrong who fought

Sugar Ray Robinson who fought

Denny Moyer who fought

Rafael Rodriguez who fought

William Page who fought

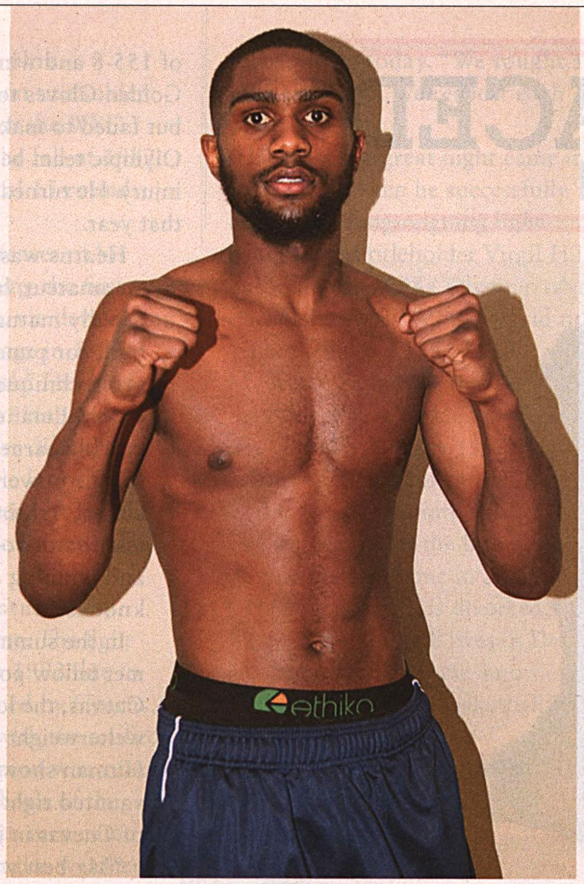
Mahan Washington who fought

Juan Diaz who fought

Francisco Lorenzo who fought

Jorge Linares

VIRGILIO MOGUEL



NEW FACES

JARON ENNIS

BY ANSON WAINWRIGHT

As far back as Jaron Ennis can remember, he's been involved in boxing some way or another. He was born in a fight town, Philadelphia. His two older brothers, Derek and Farah, and father, Bozy, also boxed.

"He was young, maybe four, five months, in one of those little strollers," his father said of Jaron's first visit to a boxing gym. "He learned from everybody."

Initially, Ennis' mother didn't want him to fight, but it was always likely "Boots" would follow his father and brothers.

By the time Ennis had reached his teenage years, he was sparring the likes of Julian Williams, Ray Robinson and Kyrone Davis. His father decided to let him learn at the gym instead of working his way up on the amateur scene.

In 2014, in his first attempt at a national amateur title, Ennis reached the 141-pound final of the Golden Gloves tournament, where he lost to Gary Antuanne Russell. The following year he returned and collected gold.

Ennis went on to win four national titles and enjoyed a stellar 2015, fighting 25 times, and by the end of the year he had aspirations of joining Team USA at the 2016 Olympics in Rio. He bested old rival Russell on the opening day of the Olympic Trials, but Russell (the younger brother of WBC featherweight titleholder Gary Russell Jr.) rebounded to beat Ennis in a rematch and then a winner-take-all box-off to earn the qualifying tournament title. Ennis turned pro shortly after the setback.

"I wasn't really disappointed. It was something that I wanted, but I feel I made the right decision and turned pro," he said. "Look at all the fighters who were at the Olympics. Look at my record and look at their records."

He wasn't short of opportunities. Many of the top promoters reached out with various offers.

Ennis decided to take a less-traveled route and signed with expert talent-spotter Cameron Dunkin. Ennis' father was suitably impressed by what the renowned manager had done with Demetrius Hopkins and Anthony Thompson in the past.

"I weighed all the options, and the guys who wanted to sign 'Boots,' I wasn't comfortable with," said Bozy. "I knew what type of guy he was and I know Cameron knows how to move fighters. He's had 34 world champions.

"You can't trust everybody, but you've got to trust somebody, and Cameron's the guy. I think he's one of the best boxing minds around. I don't see anybody better than him.

"I saw the big picture. Some guys were offering more money than Cameron was offering. It wasn't about the money; it was about moving my son right, make sure he's in the right place at the right time. Eventually we'll get to the money."

Ennis exited the amateur scene with a record of 58-3 and made his debut in April 2016 at 18 years old.

"Every now and again, a guy comes along and you want him," said Dunkin. "I had seen 'Boots' in the amateurs. He was sensational – great handspeed, he's lightning fast, he can punch. He had all the tools to be a top, top guy in the coming years and I was really happy that they signed with me."

Since then, Ennis has been very active, building his record to 18-0 (16 knockouts), fighting mostly on the East Coast. He's built something of a following in his hometown of Philadelphia.

The switch-hitting welterweight is close to stepping up to the 10-round level and is happy with the old-school activity of his career to date.

"I feel my career is going how I wanted it to go," said Ennis, now 20. "I don't think I'm that far away, but we're not rushing. We're just following the plan right now."

"The City of Brotherly Love" may well have its next champion-in-waiting.

Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright

BEST I FACED

BY ANSON WAINWRIGHT

THOMAS HEARNS

61-5-1 (48 KOs)

Thomas Hearns' often-frightening blend of speed, power and punching technique helped make him must-see TV during the 1980s. However, it was his fierce rivalries with fellow stars Sugar Ray Leonard, Marvin Hagler and Roberto Duran that made him a legendary boxing figure.

Known as "The Hitman," Hearns, who stood 6-foot-1, won six world titles in five weight classes, an unprecedented feat at the time. The most explosive member of the celebrated Four Kings was an elite-level boxer-puncher from welterweight to middleweight, and he possessed enough ring savvy to compete as a world-class light heavyweight.

Hearns was born in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1958. He grew up in a large family and moved to Detroit as a child.

Shortly after arriving there, a 9-year-old Hearns was introduced to boxing. He enjoyed a successful amateur career, compiling a record of 155-8 and winning the national Golden Gloves tournament in 1975, but failed to make the 1976 U.S. Olympic team because of a nose injury. He turned professional later that year.

Hearns was a pure boxer as an amateur, but thanks to a rapidly maturing body, a frame built for punching and proper pro technique taught by his coach, Emanuel Steward, he quickly earned a reputation for his power. Hearns was very active, fighting 28 times in less than two-and-a-half years and winning all but two by knockout.

In the summer of 1980, Hearns met fellow power-puncher Pipino Cuevas, the long-reigning WBA welterweight titleholder. The Hitman showed off his much-vaunted right hand, taking care of Cuevas in just two rounds.

"My best win was probably when I won my first world title against Pipino Cuevas," Hearns told THE RING. "The thing was, Pipino was known to be a knockout man with the left hook. I knew if I stayed outside of his range and used my jab, I could do a lot of things. I was able to get to him and hurt him."

In September 1981, Hearns and Leonard, the WBC titleholder, met in a hotly anticipated welterweight unification for full champion status and recognition as the best boxer on the planet. It was billed as Hearns' power versus Leonard's skills, but the Detroit attraction turned that notion on its head and proceeded to outbox the 1976 Olympic gold medalist and media darling. Entering Round 14, Hearns was ahead on the scorecards, but Leonard had come close to ending the fight in the prior session. Hearns was unable to recover and Leonard teed off until referee Davey Pearl stopped the fight.

Hearns dusted himself off and stepped up a weight class. After a couple of wins, he challenged

RING MAGAZINE

Wilfred Benitez, the ultra-talented three-division titleholder from Puerto Rico, for the WBC 154-pound title in the fall of 1982. Hearns won a tactical 15-round majority decision.

He made three defenses of his title, notably becoming the first man to knock out Duran, via devastating second-round stoppage in 1984.

"It was very special," Hearns said of blasting the great "Hands of Stone." "Nobody ever did that (to him). I threw a whole lot of great punches (in my career) – a lot of them had that impact; some had a little more impact."

In April 1985, Hearns finally met Hagler in the ring. The fight fell through twice in 1982 due to hand injuries sustained by Hearns, but the showdown with the unified middleweight champion was a much bigger event on the heels of the Duran stoppage. Both men came charging out, but Hagler weathered the storm and won in the third round of a thrilling classic.

"That was one of the best fights in history, but it wasn't my best fight," Hearns said. "I'm a winner and I know how to win. I love to win and I wanted to win that fight. It bothers me; it still bothers me today. I still think about it and wish I could do it over again.

"He was the better man that night. He was the better man because he withstood all I put on him. He took it with no problems."

Hearns didn't let the loss define him, though. He won a couple of fights before claiming the WBC light heavyweight title from Dennis Andries, and then won the vacant WBC middleweight title against Juan Roldan.

Hearns suffered a shocking third-round stoppage loss to Iran Barkley, but soon found himself facing an old rival, Leonard, almost eight years after their first clash.

Again it was a tight contest. This time it was ruled a draw.

"Me and Ray are very good friends," Hearns said of their relationship today. "We fought a long time ago. We respect each other."

Hearns' last great night came in June 1991, when he successfully challenged long-reigning light heavyweight titleholder Virgil Hill, outboxing the 1984 Olympic silver medalist to win his final world title.

The 1980 and 1984 RING Magazine Fighter of the Year lost his light heavyweight title in a rematch with Barkley in early 1992 and fought sparingly for the remainder of the decade and into the 2000s. He was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 2012.

Hearns, now 59, is divorced, has six children and still lives in Detroit. He coaches boxing. He enjoys relaxing by playing basketball and shooting pool.

Hearns graciously spoke to THE RING about the best he fought in 10 key categories.

BEST JAB

SUGAR RAY LEONARD: He's slick and very smooth with it. Ray had the ability (and) a quick left jab to keep a person at bay. He had a pretty quick jab. He kept me at bay for a while until I used my jab – and it was no contest. I had a better jab than most guys I fought.

BEST DEFENSE

WILFRED BENITEZ: He moves his head well and makes you miss a lot. He slides and hits you with jabs and hooks. Benitez was a good, solid fighter. He had great ability. He was a smart guy in the ring and he moved well.

FASTEST HANDS

LEONARD: Ray had really fast hands. Not saying I didn't have fast hands, but it all depended who got their jab off first and who got their punches off first, and that dictated who landed the best shots.

FASTEST FEET

BENITEZ: He knew how to get away from a man with a good shot. It wasn't just the footwork, it was the head and body motion. He knew how to move himself to get away from a good shot. I was able to catch him every now and again, but he had very good movement.

BEST CHIN

MARVIN HAGLER: Hands down. He took a lot of shots and kept coming; that proves he had a good chin.

SMARTEST

LEONARD: Again I'd go with Ray Leonard. Ray was smart the way he countered from mistakes, from his jab, his movement. He got in a lot by being slick.

STRONGEST

HAGLER: I hit him with everything but the kitchen sink. He continued and kept coming forward. I moved him but he just kept coming forward.

BEST PUNCHER

LEONARD: I'll have to think about that one. Iran Barkley, he was one of them … Marvin Hagler and Leonard. Ray punched pretty good. Pipino Cuevas never hit me, nor did Duran. I'd give it to Ray; he punched pretty good.

BEST BOXING SKILLS

LEONARD: Hands down, Ray Leonard. He knew how to box; he was a boxer. Ray was a very technical fighter. He knew how to move and get in, he knew how to move and get out. Ray had good offense and defense.

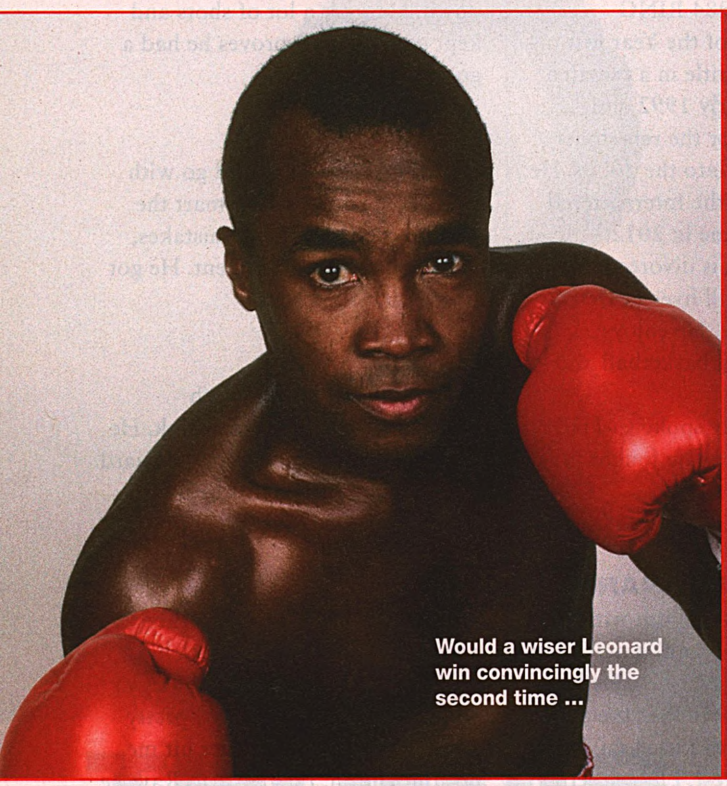
BEST OVERALL

BENITEZ: I would say Wilfred Benitez was very good. He was slick and very crafty. I like Benitez's craft. He moved well and fights all around the ring.

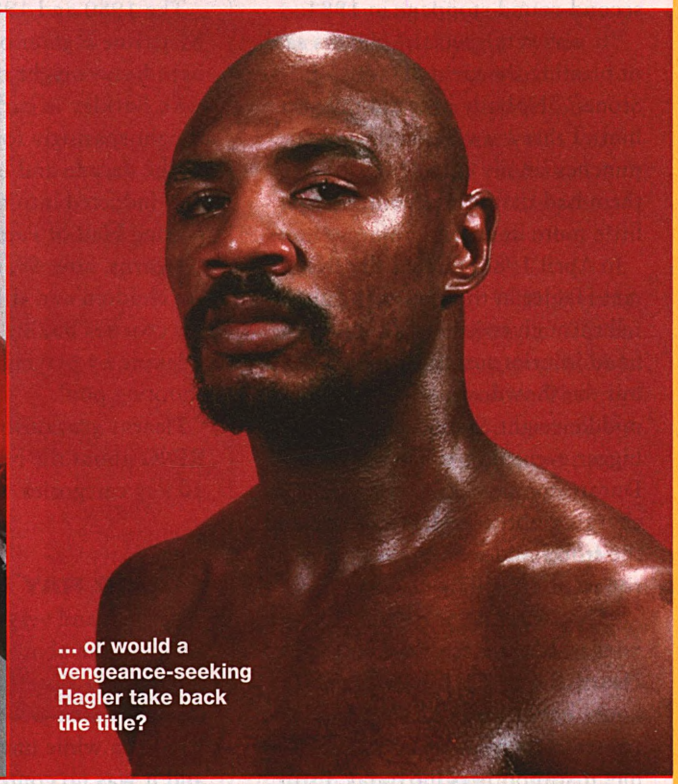
Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright

FIGHTS OF FANTASY

BY TOM GRAY



Would a wiser Leonard win convincingly the second time ...



... or would a vengeance-seeking Hagler take back the title?

SUGAR RAY LEONARD VS. MARVELOUS MARVIN HAGLER II

THREE EXPERTS – A FIGHTER, A TRAINER AND A MEDIA MEMBER – TELL YOU HOW A MYTHICAL MATCHUP WOULD PLAY OUT

Marvelous Marvin Hagler vs. Sugar Ray Leonard was seven years in the making.

"The Superfight" was discussed as early as 1980, but the camps were unable to reach a concrete agreement on weight. Two years later, Leonard suffered a detached retina and prematurely retired. By 1984, Hagler was arguably the finest pound-for-pound fighter on the planet and Leonard had returned, but the latter looked flat against the unheralded Kevin Howard and retired again.

Finally, on April 6, 1987, the stars aligned and the two best fighters of their generation came together.

With only one fight in five years, Leonard, the former welterweight and junior middleweight champion, was a prohibitive underdog in his 160-pound debut. Hagler, the undisputed middleweight king, hadn't lost in more than a decade and, despite being relatively inactive himself, was coming off crunching knockout victories over Thomas Hearns and John Mugabi.

But even with the odds stacked against him, Leonard performed brilliantly to claim a sensational 12-round split decision. How controversial was the verdict? Well, the fight was more than 30 years ago and it remains, without question, the most debated result of the modern era. To this day, Hagler refuses to accept the loss and his fan base fully supports him.

But where was the sequel? The result disgusted Hagler, who has gone on record as saying that he never wore a pair of boxing gloves after the Leonard fight. Although there was intermittent talk up until 1989, Hagler refused to be lured back and the biggest rematch in boxing history was confined to fantasy.

But what if? Three boxing insiders give their opinion on what would have happened had there been an immediate return fight.

Tom Gray is Associate Editor for THE RING. Follow him on Twitter: @Tom_Gray_Boxing

LEONARD ★ TALE OF THE TAPE ★ HAGLER

MIDDLEWEIGHT

LEONARD		HAGLER
31	AGE	33
34-1 (24 KOS)	RECORD	62-3-2 (52 KOS)
71 PERCENT	KO PERCENTAGE	84 PERCENT
ORTHODOX	STANCE	SOUTHPAW
5 FEET 10 INCHES	HEIGHT	5 FEET 9½ INCHES
74 INCHES	REACH	75 INCHES

FIGHTER:

Donny Lalonde

Former WBC light heavyweight titleholder

I thought Hagler won in 1987. My initial thought after watching it was Hagler was robbed of a decision. Neither guy, in my opinion, did enough to really win the fight, but Hagler was champion and Ray didn't take it from him. That was my initial feeling. Then I studied that fight over and over as part of my preparation to fight Ray. Now, Hagler never fought again (after the first Leonard fight) so we'll never know what he had left. Ray fought on, and although he didn't move as much against me, I don't think that was because he wasn't able to. Ray stood in front of me because he figured I was weakened from the weight loss. In a rematch with Hagler, Ray could have fought in any style he wanted to, and he may have been even more effective than he was the first time. We were all guilty of underestimating Ray during his career, but he always found another gear. It would be hard for me to pick Hagler in a rematch, because Marvin wasn't as versatile. He was a great fighter, but he only had one way of fighting and Ray had numerous ways. In the first fight, Ray beat Marvin mentally, and I think he would have done so again in the rematch.

Prediction: LEONARD

TRAINER:

Buddy McGirt

Former IBF junior welterweight/ WBC welterweight titleholder, world-class trainer

I'm friends with both guys, so this is tough. The first fight was so close, but I was fine with the decision because Hagler gave away the early rounds. But, for me, Ray would struggle to produce that type of performance again. I think that Ray had something left in the tank for Hagler, but he left it all in the ring that night. Ray also picked the right time to step up, because he saw Hagler's fight with Mugabi and said, "OK, I'm ready for him now." I was actually in training for a fight (TKO 12 Vincent Releford on April 24, 1987) when they fought. This is no lie: In that fight, I started closing rounds with quick combinations because Ray did that against Hagler, and I ended up stopping the guy because I caught him with a shot. I said to myself, "Do what Sugar Ray Leonard did," because this guy was putting a lot of heat on me. If Ray and Marvin had fought again, I'm going to go with Marvin because both would have been a little older, but Marvin was still bigger and he had something to prove. That fight would have been like "The Thrilla in Manila" – two guys over the hill, but they would put it all on the line.

Prediction: HAGLER

MEDIA:

Doug Fischer

Editor-in-chief for RING Magazine

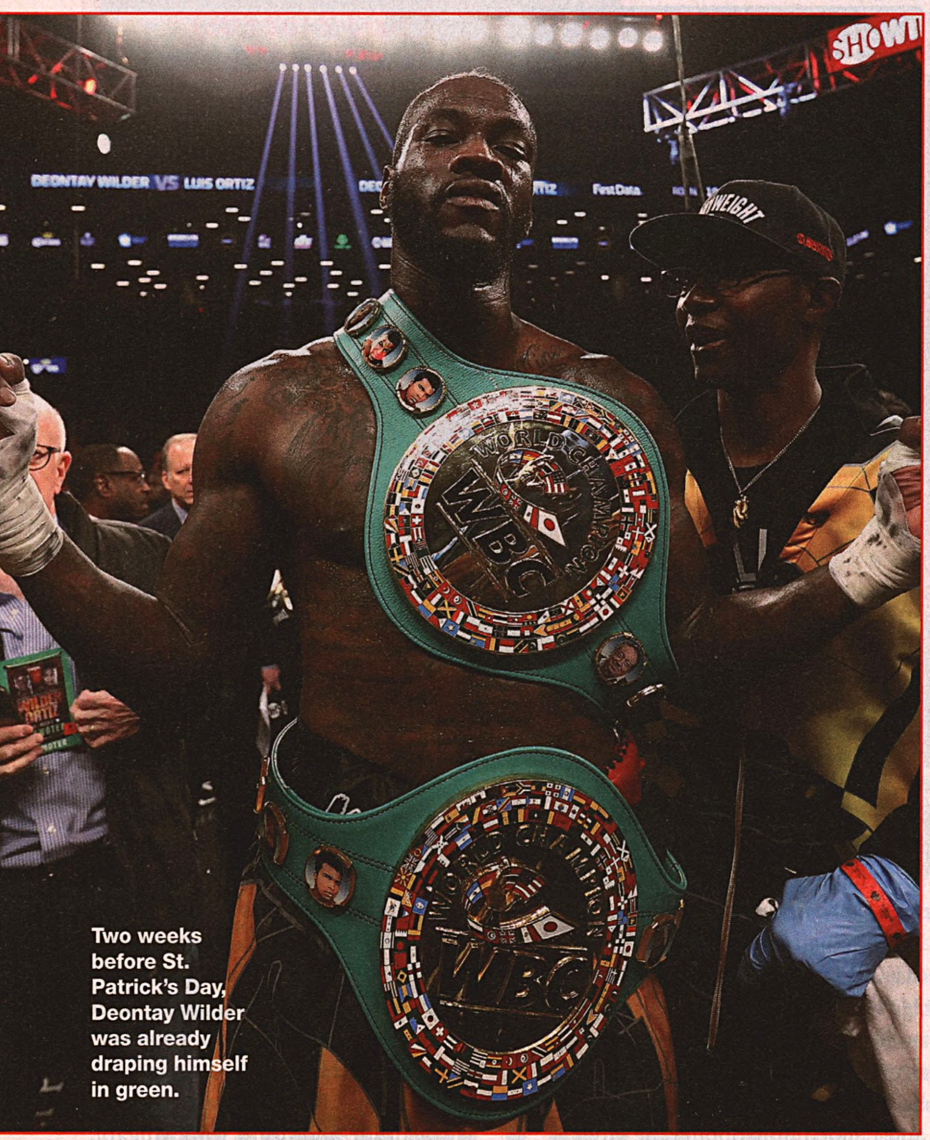
I'm a little biased because Leonard was my favorite. I totally get anyone scoring that fight seven rounds to five for Hagler, or scoring it a draw, but I've always edged it to Leonard. You're either a Leonard guy or a Hagler guy, and I'm a Leonard guy. What I will say is that Hagler was no longer Hagler going into that fight. He was no longer Hagler after the 1985 war with Hearns. After that fight, Hagler made the transition from long-reigning champion to public figure, and he'd always wanted that respect. His famous quote was, "It's tough to do roadwork at 5 a.m. when you've been sleeping in silk pajamas." Well, I think Hagler was sleeping in silk pajamas after the Hearns fight. He went life-and-death with Mugabi, who didn't have Hagler's class and was really a junior middleweight. I believe that fight took something out of him. Leonard was so mentally focused on defeating Hagler, and I just don't think Marvin can get any better. He would want revenge, but Leonard would be more psychologically dialed-in for a rematch. His legacy would be on the line. He would be just as mentally sharp as he was for the first fight and his confidence would be higher.

Prediction: LEONARD

Note: KO percentage = number of KOs divided by number of wins. Tale of the Tape at the time of the proposed fight.

RATINGS

POUND FOR POUND ★ RATINGS ANALYSIS ★ THE RING RATINGS



Two weeks before St. Patrick's Day, Deontay Wilder was already draping himself in green.

POUND FOR POUND

1 **GENNADY GOLOVKIN**
Kazakhstan • 37-0-1 (33 KOs)

2 **TERENCE CRAWFORD**
U.S. • 32-0-0 (23 KOs)

3 **VASYL LOMACHENKO**
Ukraine • 10-1-0 (8 KOs)

4 **CANELO ALVAREZ**
Mexico • 49-1-2 (34 KOs)

5 **MIKEY GARCIA**
U.S. • 38-0-0 (30 KOs)

6 **SRISASKET SOR RUNGVISAI**
Thailand • 45-4-1 (40 KOs)

7 **NAOYA INOUE**
Japan • 15-0-0 (13 KOs)

8 **ERROL SPENCE JR.**
U.S. • 23-0-0 (20 KOs)

9 **SERGEY KOVALEV**
Russia • 32-2-1 (28 KOs)

10 **GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX**
Cuba • 17-1-0 (11 KOs)

Srisaket Sor Rungvisai strengthened his P4P case.

POUND FOR POUND: In the first test of his post-Chocolatito career, Srisaket Sor Rungvisai weathered a late rally by Juan Francisco Estrada to win a majority decision on the "Superfly 2" card in Inglewood, California. The softspoken Thai hero rose from No. 10 to No. 7 as a result. Sergey Kovalev then won the second fight of his post-Ward comeback with a seventh-round stoppage of Igor Mikhalkin, but the feeling was that he didn't look spectacular and a No. 4 rating is too high at this point, so he was lowered to No. 9.

HEAVYWEIGHTS: No change.

CRUISERWEIGHTS: Kevin Lerena (No. 10 last month) emerged from a battle against Dmytro Kucher (unrated) with almost every available point in his favor and was lifted to No. 8.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS: Dmitry Bivol rose from No. 6 to No. 3 and continued to stoke the buzz around his star potential with a 12th-round knockout of Sullivan Barrera (No. 7).

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS: The semifinals of the WBSS saw Prof. George Groves (No. 2 last month) give a clumsy-by-comparison Chris Eubank Jr. a lesson in boxing fundamentals over 12 rounds. In the aftermath, Groves jumped over Gilberto Ramirez into the No. 1 position while Eubank dropped from No. 4 to No. 9. David Benavidez departed the No. 9 spot and rose to No. 5 after winning every round of a rematch with Ronald Gavril (unrated). Then, in a much-needed rematch following the late-blow controversy and post-fight suckerpunch of fight No. 1, Jose Uzcategui stopped Andre Dirrell, knocking the American off the list from No. 7 and coming in at No. 6 himself.

MIDDLEWEIGHTS: Former titleholder Andy Lee (No. 9) called it a day after 12 years in the game, his retirement leaving room for mustachioed Irishman Gary "Spike" O'Sullivan at No. 10.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS: No change.

WELTERWEIGHTS: Undefeated Lithuanian Egidijus Kavaliauskas ("Mean Machine," if it's easier on your brain) replaced Lamont Peterson at No. 10 after stopping David Avanesyan in six rounds. Kell Brook (No. 4 last month) then left the list to seek his fortune at 154, so Cuba's Yordenis Ugas debuted at No. 10.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS: Just a formality at this point, but the 140-pound division and Terence Crawford have parted ways, so he was removed as champion. The list then got a healthy shakeup after a trio of fights: Regis Prograis demolished Julius Indongo in two rounds, Mikey Garcia took care of Sergey Lipinets with a 12-round UD and Kiryl Relikh did the same against Rances Barthelemy. Consequences were: Prograis went from No. 4 to No. 2, Indongo dropped out from No. 5, Lipinets slipped from No. 7 to No. 9, Relikh (new title in hand) entered at No. 4, Barthelemy dropped out from No. 9 and Garcia watched it all happen from his perch at No. 1. A vacancy at No. 10 was filled by undefeated Russian Ivan Baranchyk.

LIGHTWEIGHTS: A housekeeping shuffle moved Luke Campbell from No. 7 to No. 6, above the less active Felix Verdejo.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS: Kenichi Ogawa (No. 6 last month) was removed from the ratings as the saga of his failed drug test (synthetic testosterone) connected to an iffy victory over Tevin Farmer in December dragged on. With Ogawa gone, unbeaten Puerto Rican Christopher Diaz took up the slack at No. 10.

FEATHERWEIGHTS: Oscar Valdez endured a broken jaw from the fifth round onward but still pulled out a unanimous decision win over Scott Quigg in a bloodlusty brawl. Valdez went from No. 6 to No. 4 and Quigg (who valiantly overcame his own facial trauma) dropped from No. 8 to No. 10.

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS: Daniel Roman went from No. 6 to No. 4 after scoring a near-shutout against Ryo Matsumoto (unrated) for a nice on-the-road victory in Japan.

BANTAMWEIGHTS: Following his second loss to Luis Nery (which was marred again, this time by Nery missing weight by a mile), Shinsuke Yamanaka announced his retirement and vacated the RING championship. In short, it was a shitty way for such a great career to end.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS: Sor Rungvisai (No. 2 last month) acquired the vacant RING championship with his win over Estrada, while Estrada's strong performance kept his rating intact – he actually rose from No. 3 to No. 2 after the Thai fighter stepped up to take the throne (No. 1-rated Naoya Inoue was skipped due to very strong indications that he's done at 115). On the same card, McWilliams Arroyo, who hadn't fought since April 2016, returned from limbo to stun No. 4-rated Carlos Cuadras with a (should've been unanimous) majority decision. Arroyo entered the list at No. 7 while Cuadras fell to No. 8.

FLYWEIGHTS: A fifth title was not in the cards for Brian Viloria (No. 10 last month), who lost a unanimous decision to Artem Dalakian and dropped out of the ratings. Dalakian rose from No. 9 to No. 3. Another to leave the list that weekend was the previous No. 3, Juan Carlos Reveco, after the Argentine was knocked out by Donnie Nietes (No. 1) in the seventh round. The two newcomers to benefit from the attrition were Cristofer Rosales (coming in at No. 9) and Muhammad Waseem (No. 10). Masayuki Kuroda (No. 8 last month) then gained a rank after outpointing countryman Katsunori Nagamine (unrated).

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHTS: No change.

STRAWWEIGHTS: No change.

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

C (VACANT)
1 ANTHONY JOSHUA — U.K. • 20-0-0 (20 KOs)
2 DEONTAY WILDER — U.S. • 40-0-0 (39 KOs)
3 JOSEPH PARKER — New Zealand • 24-0-0 (18 KOs)
4 ALEXANDER POVETKIN — Russia • 33-1-0 (23 KOs)
5 LUIS ORTIZ — Cuba • 28-1-0 (24 KOs)
6 KUBRAT PULEV — Bulgaria • 25-1-0 (13 KOs)
7 DILLIAN WHYTE — U.K. • 22-1-0 (16 KOs)
8 DOMINIC BREAZEALE — U.S. • 19-1-0 (17 KOs)
9 JARRELL MILLER — U.S. • 20-0-1 (18 KOS)
10 ADAM KOWNACKI — U.S. • 17-0-0 (14 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 LBS

C (VACANT)
1 OLEKSANDR USYK — Ukraine • 14-0-0 (11 KOs)
2 MURAT GASSIEV — Russia • 26-0-0 (19 KOs)
3 MAIRIS BRIEDIS — Latvia • 23-1-0 (18 KOs)
4 DENIS LEBEDEV — Russia • 30-2-0 (22 KOs)
5 YUNIER DORTICOS — Cuba • 22-1-0 (21 KOs)
6 KRZYSZTOF GLOWACKI — Poland • 29-1-0 (18 KOs)
7 MAKSIM VLASOV — Russia • 42-2-0 (25 KOs)
8 KEVIN LERENA — S. Africa • 20-1-0 (9 KOs)
9 ILUNGA MAKABU — Congo • 21-2-0 (20 KOs)
10 ANDREW TABITI — U.S. • 15-0-0 (12 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 LBS

C (VACANT)
1 SERGEY KOVALEV — Russia • 32-2-1 (28 KOs)
2 ADONIS STEVENSON — Canada • 29-1-0 (24 KOs)
3 DMITRY BIVOL — Russia • 13-0-0 (11 KOs)
4 ELEIDER ALVAREZ — Colombia • 23-0-0 (11 KOs)
5 OLEKSANDR GVOZDYK — Ukraine • 14-0-0 (12 KOs)
6 ARTUR BETERBIEV — Russia • 12-0-0 (12 KOs)
7 SULLIVAN BARRERA — Cuba • 21-2-0 (14 KOs)
8 BADOU JACK — Sweden • 22-1-2 (13 KOs)
9 MARCUS BROWNE — U.S. • 21-0-0 (16 KOs)
10 JOE SMITH JR. — U.S. • 23-2-0 (19 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 LBS

C (VACANT)
1 GEORGE GROVES — U.K. • 28-3-0 (20 KOs)
2 GILBERTO RAMIREZ — Mexico • 37-0-0 (25 KOs)
3 CALLUM SMITH — U.K. • 24-0-0 (17 KOs)
4 CALEB TRUAX — U.S. • 29-3-2 (18 KOs)
5 DAVID BENAVIDEZ — U.S. • 20-0-0 (17 KOs)
6 JOSE UZCATEGUI — Venezuela • 27-2-0 (23 KOs)
7 JAMES DEGALE — U.K. • 23-2-1 (14 KOs)
8 ANTHONY DIRRELL — U.S. • 31-1-1 (24 KOs)
9 CHRIS EUBANK JR. — U.K. • 26-2-0 (20 KOs)
10 JUERGEN BRAEHMER — Germany • 49-3-0 (35 KOs)

RATINGS

Through fights of March 11, 2018

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 LBS

- **C CANELO ALVAREZ** Mexico • 49-1-2 (34 KOs)
- **1 GENNADY GOLOVKIN** Kaz. • 37-0-1 (33 KOs)
- **2 DANIEL JACOBS** U.S. • 33-2-0 (29 KOs)
- **3 BILLY JOE SAUNDERS** U.K. • 26-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **4 SERGIY DEREVYANCHENKO** Ukraine • 12-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **5 JERMALL CHARLO** U.S. • 26-0-0 (20 KOs)
- **6 DEMETRIUS ANDRADE** U.S. • 25-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **7 DAVID LEMIEUX** Canada • 38-4-0 (33 KOs)
- **8 RYOTA MURATA** Japan • 13-1-0 (10 KOs)
- **9 HASSAN N'DAM** Cameroon • 36-3-0 (21 KOs)
- **10 GARY O'SULLIVAN** Ireland • 27-2-0 (19 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 LBS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 ERISLANDY LARA** Cuba • 25-2-2 (14 KOs)
- **2 JERMELL CHARLO** U.S. • 30-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **3 JARRETT HURD** U.S. • 21-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **4 SADAM ALI** U.S. • 26-1-0 (14 KOs)
- **5 BRIAN CASTANO** Argentina • 15-0-0 (11 KOs)
- **6 LIAM SMITH** U.K. • 26-1-1 (14 KOs)
- **7 AUSTIN TROUT** U.S. • 31-4-0 (17 KOs)
- **8 MICHEL SORO** France • 31-2-1 (21 KOs)
- **9 MACIEJ SULECKI** Poland • 26-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **10 JULIAN WILLIAMS** U.S. • 24-1-1 (15 KOs)

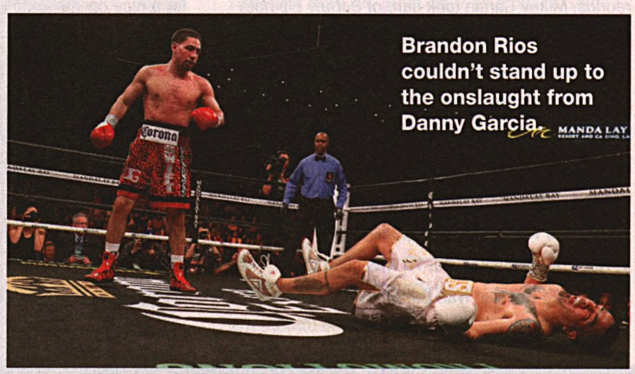
WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 LBS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 KEITH THURMAN** U.S. • 28-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **2 ERROL SPENCE** U.S. • 23-0-0 (20 KOs)
- **3 SHAWN PORTER** U.S. • 28-2-1 (17 KOs)
- **4 DANNY GARCIA** U.S. • 34-1-0 (20 KOs)
- **5 JEFF HORN** Australia • 18-0-1 (12 KOs)
- **6 MANNY PACQUIAO** Phil. • 59-7-2 (38 KOs)
- **7 JESSIE VARGAS** U.S. • 28-2-0 (10 KOs)
- **8 LUCAS MATTHYSSE** Argentina • 39-4-0 (35 KOs)
- **9 EGIDIJUS KAVALIAUSKAS** Lithuania • 19-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **10 YORDENIS UGAS** Cuba • 21-3-0 (10 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 LBS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 MIKEY GARCIA** U.S. • 38-0-0 (30 KOs)
- **2 REGIS PROGRAIS** U.S. • 21-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **3 VIKTOR POSTOL** Ukraine • 29-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **4 KIRYL RELIKH** Belarus • 22-2-0 (19 KOs)
- **5 ANTONIO OROZCO** U.S. • 26-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **6 JOSH TAYLOR** U.K. • 12-0-0 (11 KOs)
- **7 EDUARD TROYANOVSKY** Russia • 27-1-0 (24 KOs)
- **8 JOSE RAMIREZ** U.S. • 21-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **7 SERGEY LIPINETS** Russia • 13-1-0 (10 KOs)
- **10 IVAN BARANCHYK** Russia • 18-0-0 (11 KOs)

154-pounder Brian Castano broke Cedric Vitu down for a late TKO.



Brandon Rios couldn't stand up to the onslaught from Danny Garcia.

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 LBS

- **C JORGE LINARES** Venezuela • 44-3-0 (27 KOs)
- **1 MIKEY GARCIA** U.S. • 38-0-0 (30 KOs)
- **2 ROBERT EASTER** U.S. • 21-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **3 RAYMUNDO BELTRAN** Mexico • 35-7-1 (21 KOs)
- **4 RICHARD COMMEY** Ghana • 26-2-0 (23 KOs)
- **5 ANTHONY CROLLA** U.K. • 32-6-3 (13 KOs)
- **6 LUKE CAMPBELL** U.K. • 17-2-0 (14 KOs)
- **7 FELIX VERDEJO** Puerto Rico • 23-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **8 DEJAN ZLATICANIN** Montenegro • 23-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **9 YVAN MENDY** France • 40-4-1 (19 KOs)
- **10 JAVIER FORTUNA** Dom. Rep. • 33-2-1 (23 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 LBS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 VASYL LOMACHENKO** Ukraine • 10-1-0 (8 KOs)
- **2 MIGUEL BERCHELT** Mexico • 33-1-0 (29 KOs)
- **3 GERVONTA DAVIS** U.S. • 19-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **4 ALBERTO MACHADO** P.R. • 19-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **5 FRANCISCO VARGAS** Mexico • 24-1-2 (17 KOs)
- **6 TEVIN FARMER** U.S. • 25-5-1 (5 KOs)
- **7 MIGUEL ROMAN** Mexico • 59-12-0 (46 KOs)
- **8 JEZREEL CORRALES** Panama • 22-2-0 (8 KOs)
- **9 JHONNY GONZALEZ** Mexico • 65-10-0 (54 KOs)
- **10 CHRISTOPHER DIAZ** Puerto Rico • 22-0-0 (14 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 LBS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 LEO SANTA CRUZ** U.S. • 34-1-1 (19 KOs)
- **2 GARY RUSSELL JR.** U.S. • 28-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **3 CARL FRAMPTON** U.K. • 24-1-0 (14 KOs)
- **4 OSCAR VALDEZ** Mexico • 24-0-0 (19 KOs)
- **5 LEE SELBY** U.K. • 26-1-0 (9 KOs)
- **6 ABNER MARES** Mexico • 31-2-1 (15 KOs)
- **7 JOSEPH DIAZ JR.** U.S. • 26-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **8 JESUS ROJAS** P.R. • 26-1-2 (19 KOs)
- **9 JOSH WARRINGTON** U.K. • 26-0-0 (6 KOs)
- **10 SCOTT QUIGG** U.K. • 34-2-2 (25 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 LBS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX** Cuba • 17-1-0 (11 KOs)
- **2 JESSIE MAGDALENO** U.S. • 25-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **3 REY VARGAS** Mexico • 31-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **4 DANIEL ROMAN** U.S. • 24-2-1 (9 KOs)
- **5 DIEGO DE LA HOYA** Mexico • 20-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **6 MOISES FLORES** Mexico • 25-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **7 ISAAC DOGBOE** Ghana • 18-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **8 RYOSUKE IWASA** Japan • 25-2-0 (16 KOs)
- **9 JULIO CEJA** Mexico • 32-2-0 (28 KOs)
- **10 TOMOKI KAMEDA** Japan • 34-2-0 (20 KOs)

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RATINGS

Through fights of March 11, 2018

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 LBS

C (VACANT)

1 ZOLANI TETE
S. Africa • 26-3-0 (21 KOs)

2 JAMIE MCDONNELL
U.K. • 29-2-1 (13 KOs)

3 RYAN BURNETT
U.K. • 18-0-0 (9 KOs)

4 JUAN CARLOS PAYANO
Dom. Rep. • 19-1-0 (9 KOs)

5 ZHANAT ZHAKIYANOV
Kaz. • 27-2-0 (18 KOs)

6 LIBORIO SOLIS
Venezuela • 25-5-1 (11 KOs)

7 LEE HASKINS
U.K. • 35-4-0 (14 KOs)

8 EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ
P.R. • 17-0-0 (12 KOs)

9 PAUL BUTLER
U.K. • 26-1-0 (14 KOs)

10 OMAR NARVAEZ
Argentina • 48-2-2 (25 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 LBS

C SRISASKET SOR RUNGVISAI
Thailand • 45-4-1 (40 KOs)

1 NAOYA INOUE
Japan • 15-0-0 (13 KOs)

2 JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA
Mexico • 36-3-0 (25 KOs)

3 KHALID YAFAI
U.K. • 23-0-0 (14 KOs)

4 JERWIN ANCAJAS
Phil. • 29-1-1 (20 KOs)

5 RAU'SHEE WARREN
U.S. • 15-2-0 (4 KOs)

6 ROMAN GONZALEZ
Nicaragua • 46-2-0 (38 KOs)

7 MCWILLIAMS ARROYO
Puerto Rico • 17-3-0 (14 KOs)

8 CARLOS CUADRAS
Mexico • 36-3-1 (27 KOs)

9 JONAS SULTAN
Phil. • 14-3-0 (9 KOs)

10 REX TSO
China • 22-0-0 (13 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 LBS

C (VACANT)

1 DONNIE NIETES
Phil. • 41-1-4 (23 KOs)

2 DAIGO HIGA
Japan • 15-0-0 (15 KOs)

3 ARTEM DALAKIAN
Ukraine • 16-0-0 (11 KOs)

4 MORUTI MTHALANE
S. Africa • 35-2-0 (24 KOs)

5 SHO KIMURA
Japan • 16-1-2 (9 KOs)

6 ANDREW SELBY
U.K. • 10-0-0 (5 KOs)

7 MASAYUKI KURODA
Japan • 29-7-3 (16 KOs)

8 FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.
Mexico • 26-4-1 (18 KOs)

9 CRISTOFER ROSALES
Nicaragua • 26-3-0 (17 KOs)

10 MUHAMMAD WASEEM
Pakistan • 8-0-0 (6 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 LBS

C RYOICHI TAGUCHI
Japan • 27-2-2 (12 KOs)

1 KEN SHIRO
Japan • 12-0-0 (6 KOs)

2 MILAN MELINDO
Phil. • 37-3-0 (13 KOs)

3 CARLOS CANIZALES
Venezuela • 19-0-1 (16 KOs)

4 PEDRO GUEVARA
Mexico • 30-3-1 (17 KOs)

5 GANIGAN LOPEZ
Mexico • 28-7-0 (17 KOs)

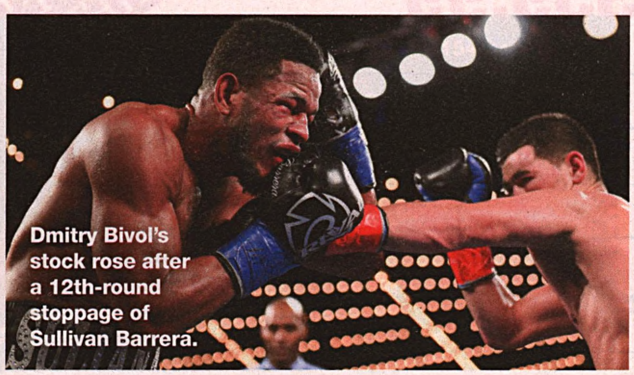
6 HEKKIE BUDLER
S. Africa • 31-3-0 (10 KOs)

7 FELIX ALVARADO
Nicaragua • 31-2-0 (27 KOs)

8 AKIRA YAEGASHI
Japan • 25-6-0 (13 KOs)

9 ANGEL ACOSTA
P.R. • 17-1-0 (17 KOs)

10 REY LORETO
Phil. • 24-14-0 (16 KOs)



Dmitry Bivol's stock rose after a 12th-round stoppage of Sullivan Barrera.

McWilliams Arroyo shocked Carlos Cuadras with his aggression.

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 LBS

C (VACANT)

1 WANHENG MENAYOTHIN
Thailand • 49-0-0 (17 KOs)

2 KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART
Thailand • 17-0-0 (7 KOs)

3 HIROTO KYOGUCHI
Japan • 9-0-0 (7 KOs)

4 BYRON ROJAS
Nicaragua • 24-3-3 (10 KOs)

5 JOSE ARGUMEDO
Mexico • 21-4-1 (13 KOs)

6 RYUYA YAMANAKA
Japan • 15-2-0 (4 KOs)

7 SIMPHIWE KHONCO
S. Africa • 18-5-0 (7 KOs)

8 LEROY ESTRADA
Panama • 16-2-0 (6 KOs)

9 CARLOS BUITRAGO
Nicaragua • 30-3-1 (17 KOs)

10 TATSUYA FUKUHARA
Japan • 19-6-6 (7 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED
RECORDS PROVIDED BY BOXREC.COM

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. THE RING's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the RING title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his championship weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

THE RING Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

THE RING POLICY ON RATED BOXERS WHO TEST POSITIVE FOR PERFORMANCE-ENHANCING DRUGS

THE RING will remove from its ratings any rated boxer — including a champion — if such boxer at some point undergoes drug testing (Olympic-style or otherwise) and that boxer tests positive for a performance-enhancing drug.

In the event that a boxer has undergone testing in which the boxer provides two samples ("A" and "B") and the boxer's "A" and subsequent "B" samples test positive for a performance-enhancing drug or if his "A" sample tests positive and he waives his right to have the "B" sample tested, then the boxer shall immediately be removed from the ratings.

A boxer whose "A" sample tested positive and is awaiting the results of his "B" sample will not be allowed to fight for a championship or rise in the ratings.

A boxer who is removed because of a positive test will have the opportunity to earn his way back into the ratings after any suspension period is completed.

A boxer who is dropped also may be reinstated if the testing agency subsequently reverses its decision or a court of competent jurisdiction finds that the test result was invalid.

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BACK ISSUES | APPAREL | SUBSCRIBE

ALIGNING THE STARS

IT TOOK A LOT OF TEAMWORK, BUT EVENTUALLY LINARES-LOMACHENKO FELL INTO PLACE

By **Steve Kim**

In the lead-up to and the immediate aftermath of Jorge Linares' victory over Mercito Gesta on January 27, there was rampant speculation that the reigning lightweight champion could potentially be facing the highly regarded Vasyl Lomachenko.

The skilled Ukrainian southpaw, who has won major titles in two weight classes in fewer than a dozen bouts, was having problems securing fights with the other 130-pound titleholders and had made his intentions clear that he would be moving up in weight.

It was a compelling idea. The Linares-Lomachenko matchup – which pairs two of the most stylish and elegant boxers in the world – is among the most attractive in the sport. And both fighters made it abundantly clear that they were more than willing to face one another inside the squared circle.

While most of the terms between the two sides were agreed to relatively quickly, there was one major hurdle that needed to be cleared. Golden Boy Promotions – which has a close working relationship with HBO – was unwilling to put their fighter, Linares, on ESPN during a competing HBO broadcast, which is the case on May 12, when a replay of the May 5 Canelo-Golovkin pay-per-view was scheduled to accompany Sadam Ali's first title defense against Liam Smith. And Top Rank, which has an exclusive deal with ESPN, could not showcase Lomachenko on any other network.

For a spell, this particular issue threatened to put the kibosh on the fight. »

LINARES/LOMACHENKO: SEAN M. HAFFEY

ALIGNING THE STARS

Linares, who is co-promoted by Teiken, made it clear to his handlers that the fight with Lomachenko was his only priority at this juncture.

"I spoke with Oscar (De La Hoya, the founder of Golden Boy) and Roberto Diaz (Golden Boy's matchmaker) and I told them to go and make the biggest fight," Linares told THE RING from his training camp in Japan through manager Jose De La Cruz. "Originally, we were talking about Mikey (Garcia) at the beginning of the year and Mikey never decides what he really wants to do – whether he wants to come down in weight, up in weight, come down, come up, fight different fighters.

"So the name of Lomachenko came up, and when it came up I said, 'Please, I want this fight. It's a priority.' Because I want everyone to see me as an elite fighter."

While Linares (44-3, 27 knockouts) has won world titles in three weight classes – featherweight, junior lightweight and lightweight – the Venezuelan still lacks that signature, career-defining victory. But would network allegiances, which so often plague the boxing business, expunge this opportunity for him?

Through it all, Eric Gomez, the president of Golden Boy, was tasked with keeping Linares and his team abreast of the situation while also trying to work out a compromise that would work for everybody.

"At first, there was a lot of stuff out there and a lot of stuff (Linares) didn't understand," said Gomez. "But when we finally got together with him and explained to him that we had a plan B, a plan C, he was cool. After that he was good, because we had a backup plan and we had a backup plan to the backup plan. He understood what was at stake and he understood what was going on. When you have a fighter like Linares who's a multi-division champion and really starting to come into his own as a pound-for-pound fighter, he has options. It's not like it's one and done. He had options, and there were other things we were looking at."

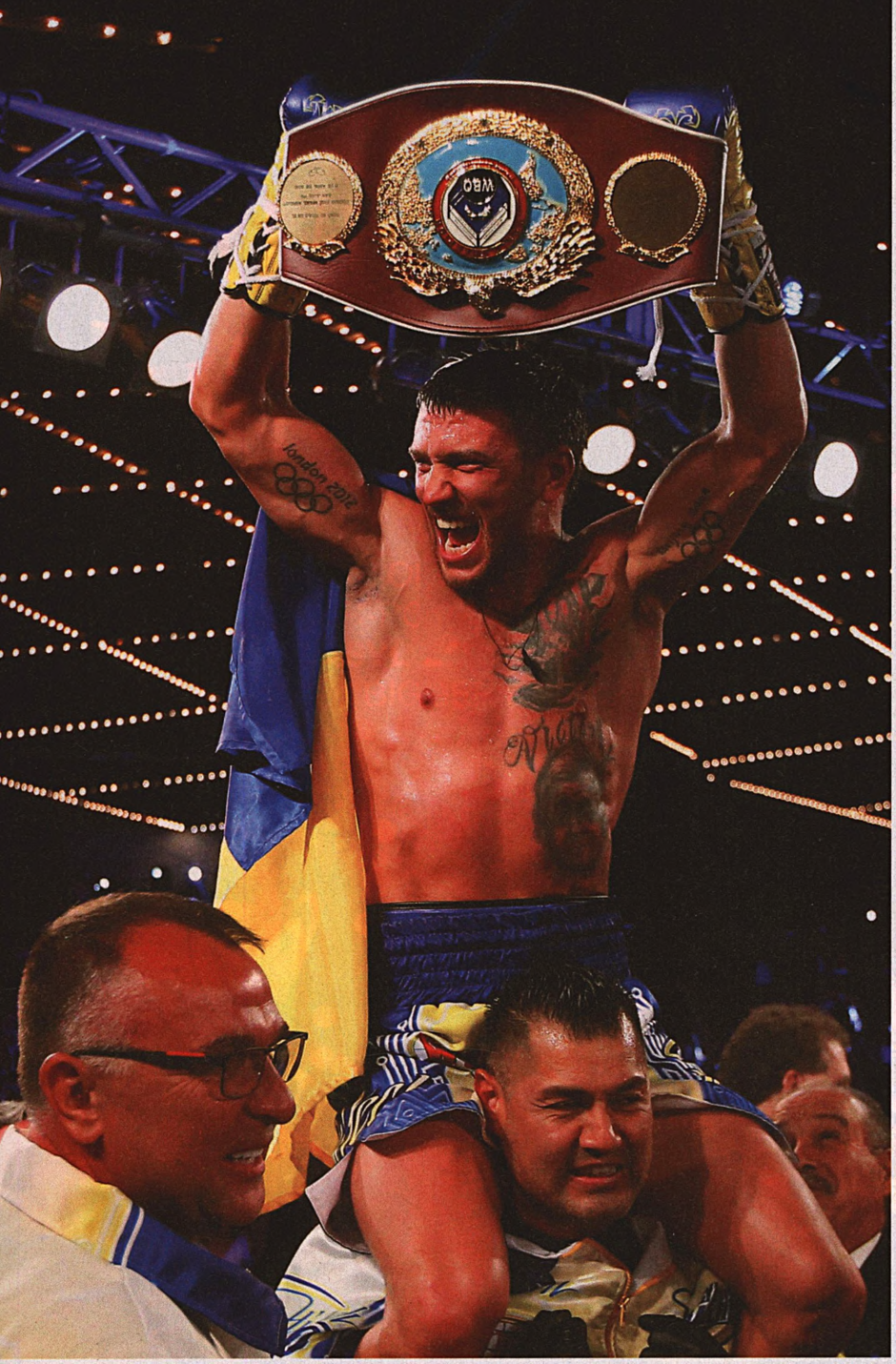
Given that Golden Boy has its own relationship with ESPN, Gomez believed the network could broker a deal that would suit both parties. It was his suggestion that the start time of the ESPN card be moved up so as to not counter-program the HBO broadcast that night. And eventually the network agreed by moving an SEC women's softball game.

And just like that, we have Linares-Lomachenko at the famed Madison Square Garden on May 12.

Bob Arum, the head of Top Rank, said he never gave up on this fight coming to fruition.

"It didn't make sense (to give up) if both fighters want the fight," Arum told THE RING. "And the answer was resoundingly 'yes.' Both fighters wanted the fight, and with both fighters wanting the fight, any obstacle I knew could be overcome.

"The obstacle of the fact that it was counter-programming the (replay) of the Gennady Golovkin-



Vasyl Lomachenko's last Madison Square Garden appearance – a domination of Guillermo Rigondeaux in The Theater – was sensational, but on May 12 he'll be in the big room against a much bigger boxer.

RICH SCHULTZ

Saul Alvarez pay-per-view, I didn't think was that important. But I could see where it was a legitimate reason to go to another date. But we were locked into that date, May 12, because of programming, et cetera.

"We thought we could do a great rating – which we will – and we had taken The Garden, so we couldn't move. And then a solution was found. The solution was to move the start time of our telecast up one hour. It was as easy as that. Everything fell into place."

Arum notes that ESPN's role was huge.

"It couldn't have been done without them. And if we're giving out kudos, we have to give out kudos to the SEC, because they moved up the women's softball game."

Boxing has seen its share of "cold war" situations that have kept certain fights from taking place. When asked if this represented some sort of "thaw," Arum responded "No, no, no ... I mean, we've never had any problems working deals out with Golden Boy when it made sense. There will always be competitive aspects, but this is business – and if it's good business for both of us, business will be made."

Bottom line, the fight is signed, sealed and delivered. And Linares got the fight he yearned for.

"Jorge wanted this fight from day one," said De La Cruz. "The name came up, conversations started about Lomachenko, Jorge wanted this fight 100 percent."

Linares was relieved to get the deal to the finish line.

"I'm just thankful to Mr. (Akihiko) Honda (who heads up Teiken Promotions), because he has a great relationship with Bob Arum," he said. "I was never concerned with HBO or ESPN because Bob is with ESPN and Golden Boy's with HBO. I just wanted to make the fight happen and I let Mr. Honda take the lead on this and trusted him like I've done my whole life. I'm just grateful the fight's done."

And yes, Linares is more than excited by this opportunity.

"Not only am I excited, more than anything I'm grateful it got done, because it wasn't looking good at the beginning. I'm just really thankful the fight got done, and when I wake up in the morning I'm just really motivated to show everyone the type of fighter I am.

"I want to show everyone that I can beat the No. 1 pound-for-pound fighter, and I want everyone to see me as one of the best pound-for-pound fighters in the world. In my livelihood, you only get one of these chances to fight the best fighter in the world. And I know I'm in the best stage of my career, and I know I can beat this guy." RING

LEGACY IN PROGRESS

CALL HIM 'FIGHTER OF THE YEAR' OR 'NO. 1 POUND-FOR-POUND' IF YOU WANT (OR NOT), BUT **VASYL LOMACHENKO** HAS HIS EYE ON A BIGGER PICTURE

By **Doug Fischer**

Vasyl Lomachenko's selection as the 2017 Fighter of the Year by THE RING and the Boxing Writers Association of America did not come without some criticism.

Lomachenko's detractors claimed he did what he was supposed to do last year when he forced Jason Sosa, Miguel Marriaga and the respected but undersized Guillermo Rigondeaux to retire between rounds in defenses of his WBO 130-pound title. Some hardcore fans took to social media to loudly express their belief that Terence Crawford and Srisaket Sor Rungvisai were more deserving of the honor.

Never mind that some of the same fans (and media) who refuse to give Lomachenko credit for the Rigondeaux victory boldly predicted that the Cuban standout would give him fits when the two-time Olympic gold medalists matched skills at The Hulu Theater inside Madison Square Garden on December 9. The criticism doesn't bother Lomachenko, whose mind is firmly focused on a much bigger prize than fighter-of-the-year awards.

"I feel good about being named Fighter of the Year, but that wasn't my goal. My goal is to make history in boxing," Lomachenko told THE RING through interpreter Daniel Bagdasarov.

Lomachenko (10-1, 8 knockouts) will take another step in the direction of that goal when he challenges Jorge Linares for the RING and WBA lightweight titles on May 12 at Madison Square Garden. This time the wizardly southpaw will headline in the big room of the storied New York City arena, and nobody can accuse him of picking on a little guy.

Both Linares, who is promoted by Golden Boy Promotions in the U.S., and Lomachenko, who is guided by Top Rank, were in the hunt for a major fight. With lightweight standout Mikey Garcia currently toiling in the 140-pound division, it made sense for the lightweight champ and the No. 1 junior lightweight to hook up, but the business side of boxing threatened to block the dream matchup due to Linares' ties to HBO and Top Rank's exclusive deal with

ESPN. However, the promoters – perhaps pushed by the desire of their stable standouts – worked out their differences and Linares-Lomachenko will be presented to the widest possible U.S. audience on ESPN.

"It was a surprise when I was told that the fight was made," Lomachenko admitted. "A lot of good fights don't happen because of their ties to different networks ... so I'm glad we were able to negotiate and talk it over for this fight to happen."

Lomachenko was already a few weeks into his training camp when THE RING visited him at the Boxing Laboratory gym in Oxnard, California. On this day, March 26, he sparred eight 2-minute rounds with Michael Perez in a tiny 16-by-16-foot ring in an upstairs loft area of the factory-sized gym. It took seven rounds before Perez, a solid technician who fights at lightweight and junior welterweight, was able to land a clean punch to Lomachenko's face.

"It's a never-ending learning process being in the ring with this guy," said Perez, who at that point had already shared two six-round sparring sessions with Lomachenko. "He shows you something different every time, every round. No matter which way he moves, or from what angle he throws, he's always in position to hit you. But he's never there to be hit.

"If it ain't his feet, it's his hands or his head, but something is always moving with him. I've sparred with a lot of champions, I've done many rounds with Mikey Garcia, but nobody compares to Lomachenko."

Most of the boxing world agrees with Perez's assessment. Even Lomachenko's critics favor him to beat Linares (44-3, 27 KOs), an immensely skilled three-division beltholder from Venezuela who carries a 13-bout win streak into their May 12 showdown.

And despite Linares' speed, greater size and extensive professional experience, Lomachenko does not appear to believe the worldly champion presents any special problem or challenge.

"Watching him fight, I'm not seeing anything I should worry about," said Lomachenko, who ended his legendary amateur career with one of the best records in history, 396-1. "But I know he will try to show me something in the ring. For now, I just watch tape on him. I'm getting ready. I'm doing my homework.

"I had a lot of amateur fights, lots of experience, and his style fits my background. I fought guys with his style before. Yes, he's fast, he's strong, he moves well – so we will see how I deal with that. I'm making my plan now on beating him. I'm not saying I'm going to break him down or knock him out, but I'm going to be ready for him and I'm going to put on a show."

If his sparring tactics on March 26 were indicative of his May 12 game plan, he will indeed put on a show and he probably does intend to break Linares down.

Lomachenko was the aggressor during the 16 minutes of work, but it was his unique brand of pressure. He was in Perez's face for the duration of the first round but barely threw a punch – only fast counter jabs. The 30-year-old master boxer introduced hard lefts to the body in Round 2, darting in and out of range with a dancer's balance and quick jab, straight left, jab combinations that forced Perez to the ropes.

Between rounds, Lomachenko paced around his corner as his coach and father, Anatoly, appeared to give him very direct instructions. He must have been asked to feint more, because he mixed those taunting head movements in with more speed and aggression in Rounds 3 and 4. Perez flashed a good jab and was able to land it to Lomachenko's chest, but the Ukrainian's head remained untouched thanks to his upper-body movement and punch-blocking ability.

Lomachenko began to speak with his father during the 1-minute rests over the second half of the session. He employed different tactics in Rounds 5 and 6, backing away from Perez to the center of the ring in hopes of drawing his sparring partner off the ropes. Perez took the bait, attacking

Vasyl Lomachenko imposed his special style of aggression on skilled fringe contender Michael Perez during a fast-paced sparring session.

MATT TUCKER

the "easy" target a stationary Lomachenko presented behind a high guard, and the battle-tested New Jersey native paid the price for his zeal as he was countered – hard – to the body.

Win, lose or draw, Perez has always exhibited heart in compiling a respectable 25-2-2 pro record, but Lomachenko has a knack for chipping away the confidence of even the grittiest of tough guys. Rounds 7 and 8 seemed a bit cruel as he tripled and quadrupled his jab on a fatigued-looking Perez before snapping the fringe contender's head back with straight lefts. However, the two traded heavy leather on even terms in the final minute of the session.

Mental focus, fostered through daily psychological exercises, is an integral part of Lomachenko's unique training.

As camp progresses, Lomachenko will spar longer sessions with 3-minute rounds and his roster of sparring partners will expand beyond Perez. It's hard to imagine that he will get even sharper during the month of April, but he will need to be at his best against Linares despite what fans and oddsmakers believe.

Lomachenko, who started camp at 146 pounds, still has the shoulders of a featherweight. He can carry 135 pounds (his 2012 Olympic gold medal was in the 132-pound division), but lightweight is not his optimum weight class.

"I'm really a featherweight," Lomachenko said. "I fought at 60 kilograms as an amateur only because they changed the weight classes in the Olympics. I stayed at the new weight class rather than drop down and drain myself, but I'm not a natural 135-pounder.

"That's why I dropped down to featherweight when I turned pro. I've gone up in weight for the challenges. Right now, I'm preparing for the lightweight title, but I'm not thinking about anything beyond this fight. I don't know if I'll stay at lightweight or if I'll ever try to fight at 140 pounds."

Whichever weight class he chooses to campaign in, Lomachenko will entertain. There's showmanship in his blood. He didn't mind THE RING's cameras as he worked the heavybag following his sparring session, and he did tricks on the speedbag when he noticed a couple young amateur boxers peering at him from the top of the loft's staircase.

Lomachenko's captivated audience was 17-year-old Amado Vargas and 13-year-old Emiliano Vargas, sons of two-time junior middleweight titleholder Fernando Vargas. The brothers, who live in Las Vegas, were visiting their father's hometown during their spring break and getting some training in at the Boxing Laboratory with their uncle Roger.

"Bro, that is sick," Emiliano said, sounding a lot like his dad, as he watched Lomachenko bounce across the ring while doing a handstand on his knuckles.

After two hours of physical training, Lomachenko engaged in 45 minutes of mental exercises with his sports psychologist, Andriy Kolosov. Lomachenko staring at a wall of checker-boxed numbers and arranging multi-colored blocks on the massage table isn't as interesting to observe as his hopping "knuckle-stands," but the disciplined intellectual stimulation obviously contributes to his uncanny in-the-ring reflexes and creativity.

"I've never worked with a talent like Lomachenko," said strength-and-conditioning coach Cecilio Flores, who counts Sergio Martinez and Manny Pacquiao as former clients. "He's the whole package.

"Since birth, his father has orchestrated what we see now."

What we're witnessing now is very rare for this era of boxing – a once-in-a-lifetime talent who wants to make the most of his prime.

"Of course, I want to fight the best," said Lomachenko when asked if he was satisfied with his 2017 accomplishments and how 2018 has begun.

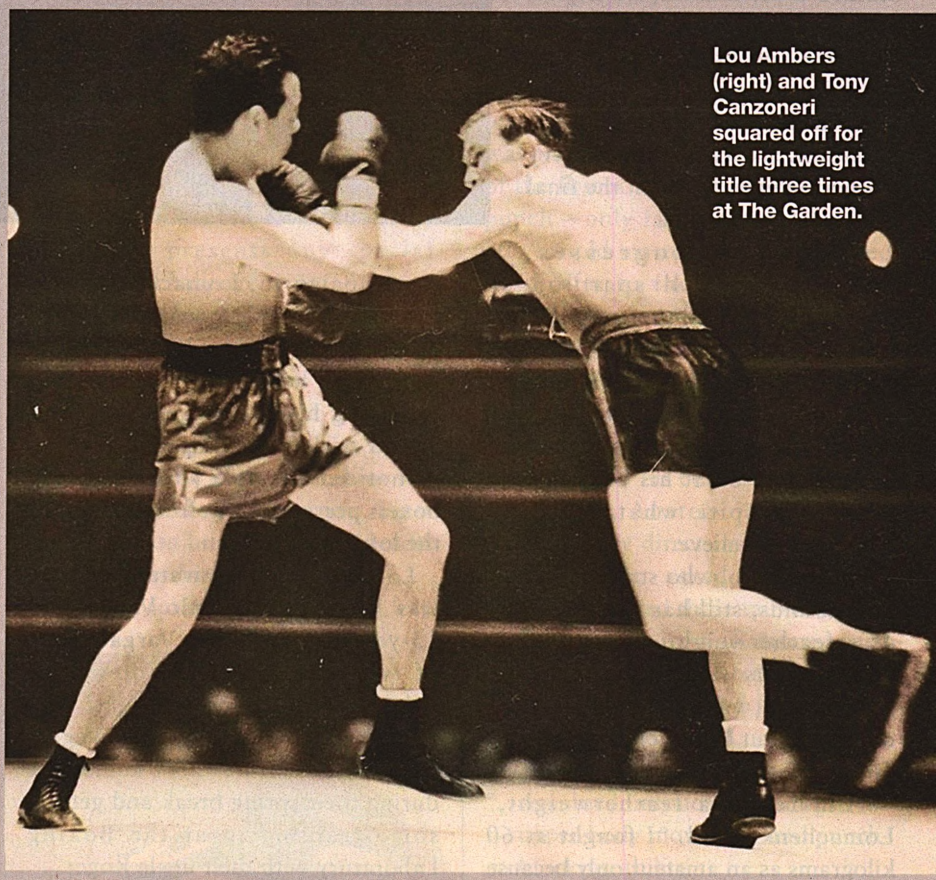
"I want the best names out there. Last year, whoever they put in front of me, whoever was available at that time, that's who I fought. I did well. I was boxer of the year, so I must be doing something right.

"I'm starting this year off with a big fight, but I need to finish the same way." RING

GARDEN OF LIGHTWEIGHT DELIGHTS

LINARES-LOMACHENKO IS AN OVERDUE ADDITION TO MADISON SQUARE GARDEN'S LEGACY OF 135-POUND TITLE FIGHTS

By **Lee Groves**



Lou Ambers (right) and Tony Canzoneri squared off for the lightweight title three times at The Garden.

Though the physical location of Madison Square Garden has changed several times since the first of four incarnations opened in 1879, the spiritual meaning behind "The Mecca of Boxing" has remained constant: The best fighting the best in the greatest media market on planet Earth. The four MSGs have hosted hundreds of title fights, but the May 12 lightweight showdown between RING/WBA champion Jorge Linares and WBO junior lightweight king Vasyl Lomachenko represents an increasing rarity. That's because Linares-Lomachenko will be the first 135-pound title fight at The Garden since then-WBA beltholder Brandon Rios stopped John Murray in December 2011 and only the third 135-pound title fight staged there in the 21st century (Joel Casamayor-Jose Armando Santa Cruz in November 2007 being the other).

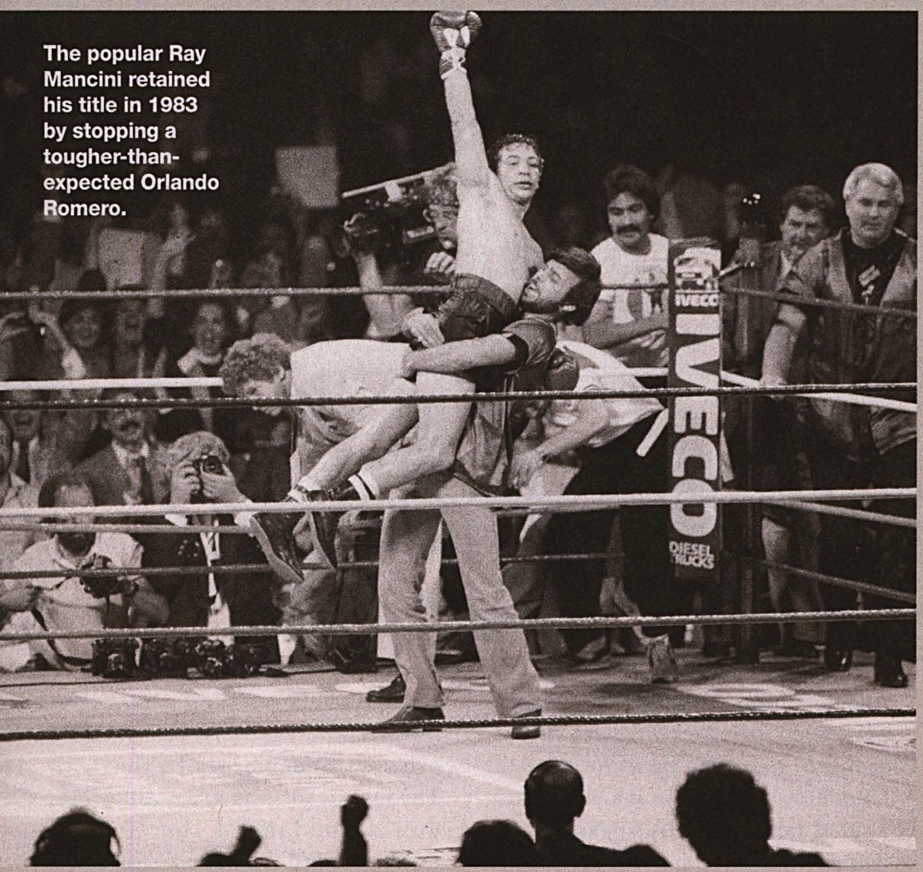
The following article will relive 10 notable lightweight championship fights from MSG's past, not just to illustrate the building's glorious past but also to demonstrate the level to which Linares-Lomachenko must rise to merit comparison.

JANUARY 14, 1921 – BENNY LEONARD TKO 6 RICHIE MITCHELL II:

One could say this was boxing's equivalent of a home-and-home series. Nearly four years earlier, Leonard stopped Mitchell in seven rounds before the aspirant's hometown fans in Milwaukee while the rematch was staged on "The Ghetto Wizard's" home turf of New York City. The first round of fight two remains among the best curtain-raisers in championship history. After Leonard dropped Mitchell three times in the first two minutes, the desperate challenger, to the shock of everyone, suddenly floored the arm-weary champion with his lethal left hook. Initially glassy-eyed, Leonard refocused, stood his ground and motioned Mitchell to come at him. Sensing a trap, Mitchell slowed his attack enough to allow Leonard to last the round. From there, a fully recovered Leonard outboxed Mitchell, flooring him four more times before the fight was stopped in the sixth. In beating Mitchell, Leonard once again proved that a fighter can win as much with his brain and with his guts as he can with his fists.

MAY 10, 1935 – TONY CANZONERI UD 15 LOU AMBERS I:

After Barney Ross vacated the lightweight title to pursue the 140-pound belt, Canzoneri and Ambers were paired to fill the void. The 21-year-old Ambers, who entered the fight with a 45-1-5 (15 KOs) record thanks to a bustling style that inspired his "Herkimer Hurricane" nickname, was a 13-to-5 favorite over Canzoneri, who, at 26, was taking part in the 135th fight of his 14-year career. Before a packed house of approximately 20,000, Canzoneri fought like the young man he was chronologically instead of the prematurely aging boxer his long years in the ring had made him. Time and again, Canzoneri snapped the circling Ambers' head back with beautifully timed jabs, skillfully avoided the younger man's counters and scored the fight's first knockdown with a rifle-shot right in the third. Canzoneri continued to pile up the points, though he did lose one of them in the 10th due to low blows. He capped a brilliant performance by decking Ambers a second time with a right to the ear in the 15th.



The popular Ray Mancini retained his title in 1983 by stopping a tougher-than-expected Orlando Romero.

SEPTEMBER 3, 1936 – LOU AMBERS UD 15 TONY CANZONERI II:

The 15-plus months between fights did a world of good for Ambers, as he won his next 14 over the likes of Fritzie Zivic, Frankie Klick and Baby Arizmendi, all of whom he outpointed over 10 rounds. During the same span, Canzoneri won 11 straight, with his victims including Klick (twice), Johnny Jadick and Jimmy McLarnin in non-title affairs, and Al Roth over 15 rounds in his only title fight (which was staged at MSG). But, as was the case before the first fight, Canzoneri wasn't sure if his legs had the same spring. In May 1935, they did and he won. In September 1936, Ambers, hungry for revenge, took those legs away with constant pressure and an inspired attack that left Canzoneri's face cut and swollen. Like the first fight, the decision was unanimous, but this time it was Ambers who won convincingly, winning 12 rounds on one card, 10 on another and nine on the third. With the score tied at one fight apiece, a rubber match was a virtual certainty.

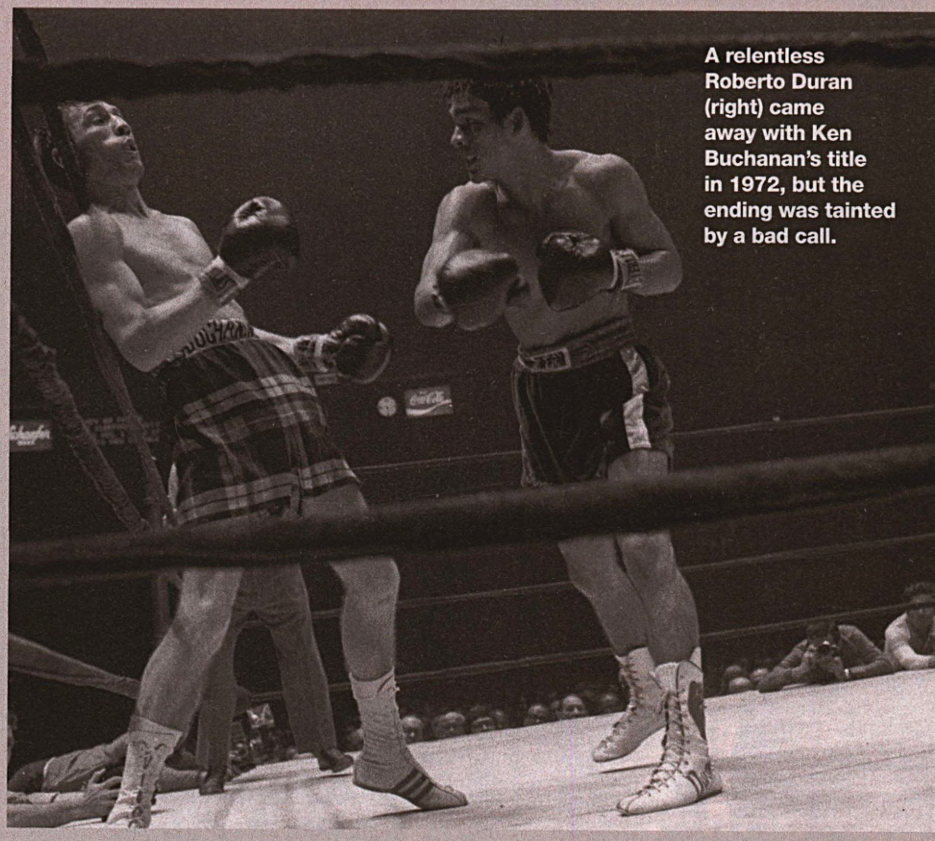
MAY 7, 1937 – LOU AMBERS UD 15 TONY CANZONERI III:

Fifty-five days after conquering Canzoneri, Ambers lost a split decision against Eddie Cool. Then, 23 days later, he dropped a unanimous decision to McLarnin. In fact, in the 10 fights between the second and third Canzoneri fights – all of which were non-title affairs – Ambers went a modest 6-3-1 while Canzoneri fought just four times, winning three and losing on points to McLarnin a month after the Ambers rematch. But as is the case with ambitious young champions, they find a way to regain their groove when the title is on the line. The confident Ambers, building on what he learned in fight two, administered a severe beating that cut the bridge of Canzoneri's nose and closed one of the former champion's eyes. Referee Arthur Donovan scored the fight 12-2-1 for Ambers while judges Charley Lynch and Eddie Forbes turned in scorecards of 13-2 and 15-0 respectively. It would be the final championship fight of Canzoneri's career, but Ambers, still just 23, was poised for even bigger and better things.

AUGUST 17, 1938 – HENRY ARMSTRONG SD 15 LOU AMBERS I:

Ambers went 9-0-1 after completing the title trilogy with Canzoneri, and, in doing so, he reversed a previous non-title decision loss to Pedro Montanez by outpointing him with the title on

the line. In fact, Ambers-Montanez was part of Mike Jacobs' "Carnival of Champions," which saw four world title fights on the same card at New York's Polo Grounds. Back at The Garden, Ambers was facing Armstrong, the featherweight champion who, in his most recent fight, had defeated Barney Ross to add the welterweight title and to extend his winning streak to 38. Scaling 134 – a half-pound more than against Ross – Armstrong set a pace even the bustling Ambers couldn't match, and he maintained that pace from first bell to last. The only reason the decision was split was because referee Billy Cavanaugh took four rounds away from Armstrong for committing infractions. Still, the win enabled Armstrong to become the first – and only – fighter ever to hold major titles in three weight classes simultaneously. They fought again at Yankee Stadium a year later, and while Ambers regained the title to stop Armstrong's streak at 46, point deductions played a pivotal role as referee Arthur Donovan deducted five rounds from Armstrong, just enough to push Ambers over the finish line and win by split decision.



A relentless Roberto Duran (right) came away with Ken Buchanan's title in 1972, but the ending was tainted by a bad call.

NOVEMBER 28, 1966 – CARLOS ORTIZ KO 14 GABRIEL "FLASH" ELORDE:

This was a rematch of their 1964 lightweight title fight staged in 130-pound titleholder Elorde's native Philippines, a contest that saw Elorde hang tough for 10 rounds before a surge by Ortiz led to the fight being stopped in Round 14. Since then, Ortiz had lost his two belts to Ismael Laguna, then regained them from him seven months later and registered two more defenses, the last of which was a chaotic fifth-round TKO against Ultiminio "Sugar" Ramos. The WBC withheld its sanction of the Elorde rematch until Ortiz granted Ramos a rematch (which he eventually did). Meanwhile, Elorde continued to yo-yo between 130 and 135, retaining the lighter belt four times but losing his OPBF lightweight title to Yoshiaki Numata. Though only a half-pound heavier than Elorde, the 135-pound Ortiz looked thicker and larger, and he used that strength along with his spearing blows to force Elorde to retreat. A hook to the body and an uppercut to the jaw visibly weakened Elorde in the 14th, after which a volley of blows capped by a vicious left uppercut left Elorde flat on his back. He remained there for the full 10-count – and for some time after – until he eventually regained his senses.

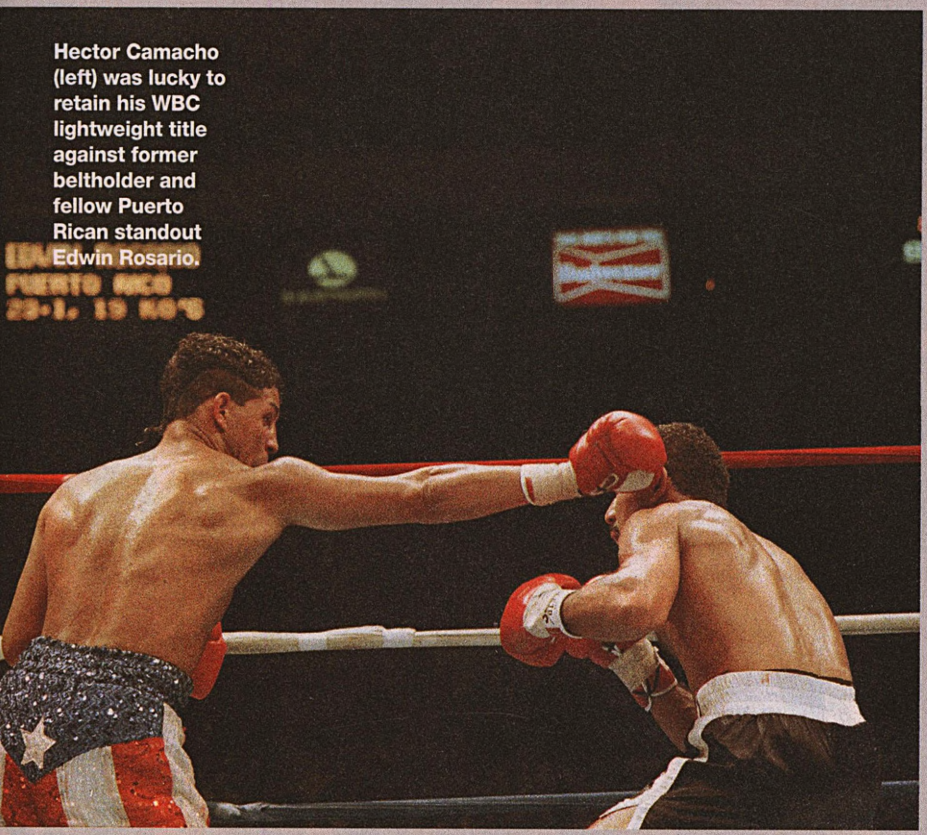
SEPTEMBER 13, 1971 – KEN BUCHANAN UD 15 ISMAEL LAGUNA II:

Nearly a year earlier, Buchanan had dethroned Laguna by split decision in Puerto Rico under tortuous triple-digit heat and through eyes that were nearly slammed shut. While heat was removed as a factor in the rematch thanks to it being staged at MSG, Buchanan's struggles with facial injuries remained. A lump under the left eye sprouted near the end of Round 3 (Buchanan said in his autobiography that it was caused by a thumb), and that lump broke open early in the fifth – a result, Buchanan said, of chief second Eddie Thomas' work with a razor between rounds to ease the pressure and Laguna's subsequent punches. Worse yet, the eye eventually swelled nearly shut, after which a severe cut over the orb was opened late in the 12th. Through it all, the gritty Buchanan dug deep, landed the stronger punches and battered the tiring Panamanian in the home stretch to secure a hard-fought and deserved points win (10-5, 9-6, 8-6-1).

JUNE 26, 1972 – ROBERTO DURAN TKO 13 KEN BUCHANAN:

On the undercard of Buchanan-Laguna II, Duran, a 20-year-old countryman of Laguna's, scored an electrifying 66-second knockout of Benny Huertas that raised plenty of eyebrows. Now, nine months later, Duran was fighting Buchanan for the lightweight championship,

and, in the fight's opening seconds, he landed an overhand right that caused Buchanan to touch both gloves on the canvas. From there, the challenger unleashed a savage and unceasing attack, but the champion, a 2-to-1 favorite, fought back with his customary skill and grit, at times getting the better of the action. The bout's final moments remain controversial; slightly after the bell ending Round 13, Duran landed a right well below the belt that left Buchanan writhing in pain. Though Buchanan wanted to continue, he wasn't allowed to come out for the 14th. Referee Johnny LoBianco awarded the fight – and the title – to Duran, saying the final blow landed on the solar plexus. Later, after viewing a TV replay, LoBianco admitted Duran had landed low, but the result still stood.



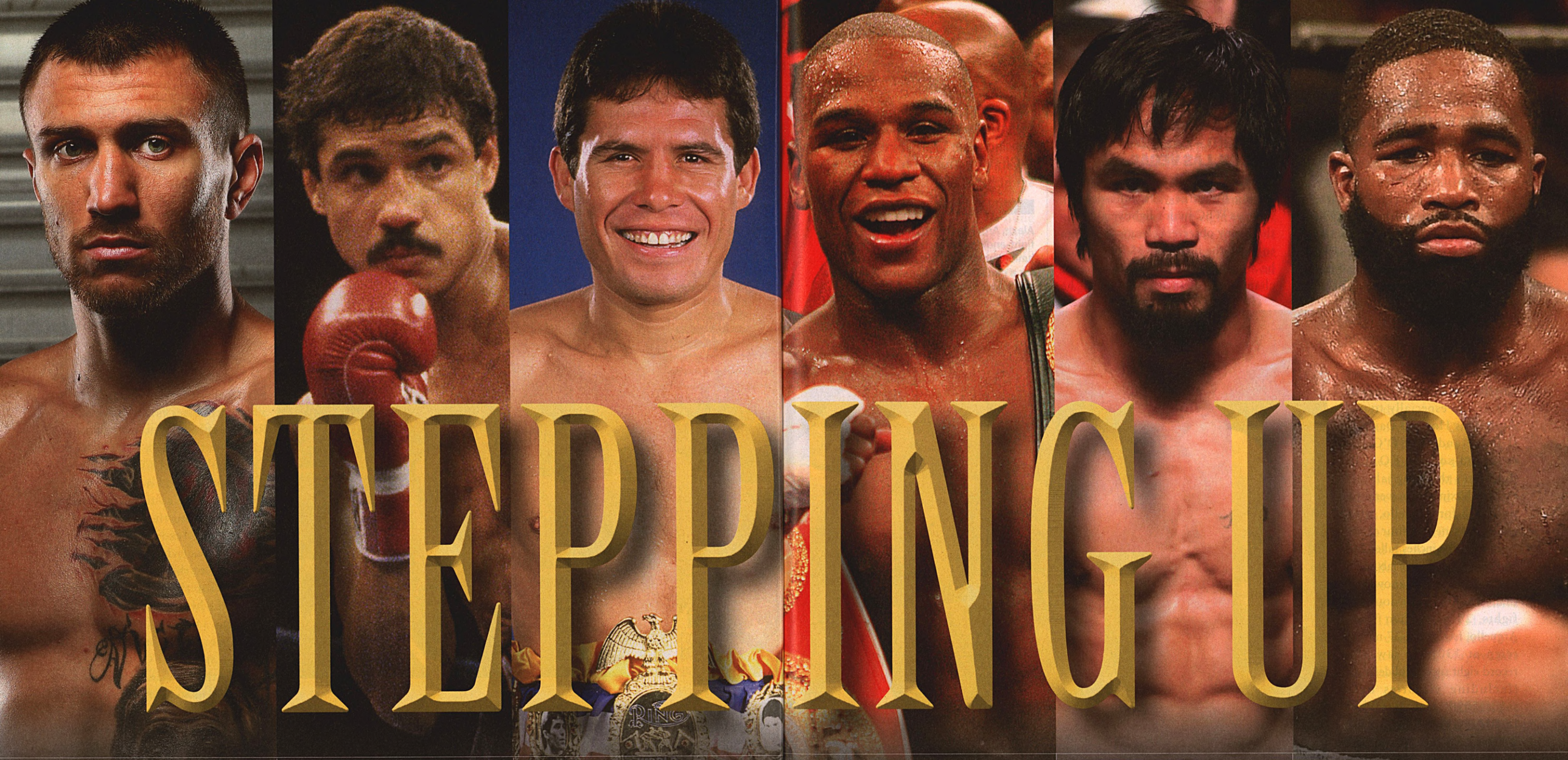
Hector Camacho (left) was lucky to retain his WBC lightweight title against former beltholder and fellow Puerto Rican standout Edwin Rosario.

SEPTEMBER 15, 1983 –
RAY MANCINI KO 9 ORLANDO ROMERO:

The first WBA lightweight title fight since Duran-Buchanan pitted the champion Mancini, a bull-strong power-hitter who often threw more than 100 punches per round, and challenger Romero, a Peruvian southpaw who sported a 30-0-1 (12 KOs) record, the No. 1 WBA rating and, because he had never previously fought outside Peru, the power of the unknown. The early action told Mancini everything he needed to know: Romero was nimble, quick-handed, strong enough to hang with "Boom Boom" in the trenches and good enough to land left crosses with impressive frequency. Entering the ninth, Romero trailed narrowly on two cards (79-77, 77-76) and was even on the third (77-77), but any thoughts of an upset were emphatically erased after Mancini landed a lightning-quick hook to the jaw that left the South American on his back. Romero, with blood masking his face, tried to rise, but by the count of 10 he had only rolled onto his knees.

JUNE 13, 1986 –
HECTOR CAMACHO SD 12 EDWIN ROSARIO:

Camacho had spent a good portion of his boxing life fighting in New York City, but because he was making the first defense of the WBC lightweight championship he won from Jose Luis Ramirez, "The Macho Man" was taking part in his first title contest at The Garden. Rosario had won four straight since losing that same WBC belt to Jose Luis Ramirez 19 months earlier. But Camacho was viewed as a significant favorite, based on his dazzling performance against Ramirez and the perception that Rosario (even at age 23) was shopworn. After falling behind early, Rosario opened a cut over Camacho's left eye in the fourth (the first cut of Camacho's career). Then, 44 seconds into the fifth, he nailed Camacho with a massive counter hook to the jaw that turned the champ's legs to rubber. The resourceful Camacho managed to survive Rosario's follow-up assault, then avoided serious trouble for the next five rounds, thanks to his constant motion and frequent jabbing. With less than a minute remaining in the 11th, Rosario staggered Camacho with a right to the jaw, and the retreating Camacho again escaped disaster and made it back to his stool. Rosario did his best to get the knockout in the 12th, but Camacho's spoiling tactics helped him put the fight in the judges' hands. Luis Rivera, who scored the fifth and 11th rounds 10-8 for Rosario, voted 114-113 for the former champ. But he was overruled by Tony Castellano and Stuart Kirshenbaum, both of whom voted 115-113 for the winner. The drama surrounding this fight, the controversial scoring and – three months later, Rosario's shocking KO of WBA titlist Livingstone Bramble on the undercard of Camacho's points win over Cornelius Boza-Edwards – made Camacho-Rosario II the hottest rematch that could be made. Unfortunately, it was never to be.



STEPPING UP

LIKE VASYL LOMACHENKO, TOP 130-POUNDERS OF THE PAST HAVE RISEN TO CHALLENGE TITLEHOLDERS AT LIGHTWEIGHT. SOME FOUND GLORY, OTHERS NOT SO MUCH.

By **Lee Groves**

Ever since turning pro, two-time Olympic gold medalist Vasyl Lomachenko has pursued his goals with a speed rivaled only by his vaunted quickness in the ring.

For those who don't count Lomachenko's six World Series of Boxing contests between January and May 2013 as pro bouts, Lomachenko tied Saensak Muangsurin's all-time record in June 2014 by winning a major title in his third pro fight – and he did it less than four months after failing to break the Thai's mark against the far heavier Orlando Salido. The worth of Lomachenko's accomplishment is further enhanced when one considers that to win the WBO featherweight title Salido had lost on the scale before beating Lomachenko, the Ukrainian southpaw thoroughly out-boxed the gifted Gary Russell Jr. to win a majority decision most say should've been unanimous.

In June 2016, Lomachenko captured a second divisional title in his seventh outing, breaking Naoya Inoue's mark of eight. Once again, he made history in spectacular fashion as he scored a one-punch knockout over defending WBO junior lightweight titleholder Roman Martinez. Since then, "No Mas-chenko's" array of skills has forced four consecutive opponents to surrender on their stools rather than continue to take their "Hi-Tech" beatings. Those opponents – Nicholas Walters, Jason Sosa, Miguel Marriaga and Guillermo Rigondeaux – boasted a combined record of 88-3-5 (68 knockouts), and, to date, Walters, Marriaga and Rigondeaux haven't fought since.

In just 11 non-WSB fights, Lomachenko has made a legitimate case for being regarded as the world's best pound-for-pound boxer, and should he defeat RING (and WBA) lightweight champion Jorge Linares May 12 at Madison Square Garden, the boxing master not only could nail down the No. 1 spot in the RING pound-for-pound rankings but will also move a big step closer toward reserving a plaque in Canastota. But if he loses, the praise and accolades will vanish and his place in the pantheon will be reassessed. For evidence of this rapid fall from grace, look no further than Roman "Chocolatito" Gonzalez, who less than two years ago was an undefeated, highly skilled four-division titleholder who sat atop virtually every pound-for-pound list. But after back-to-back defeats to Srisaket Sor Rungvisai (one disputed, one emphatic), the Nicaraguan has been forced to pick up the pieces.

By fighting Linares, Lomachenko is continuing a story line that dates back to boxing's Golden Age: an outstanding 130-pounder pursuing further glories at lightweight. Ten such fights will be profiled here – five in which the smaller man gets the job done and, in a sidebar, five in which the job was done to him.

JUNE 20, 1981: ALEXIS ARGUELLO UD 15 JIM WATT – WEMBLEY ARENA, LONDON

Just 28 days after Wilfred Benitez iced Maurice Hope to become the first boxer in nearly 43 years to win three divisional titles, Arguello became the second, thanks to an adroit decision victory over Watt. Watt, who stopped Alfredo Pitalua in April 1979 to win the WBC belt vacated by Roberto Duran, was an unlikely titlist who became a respected champion thanks to consecutive victories over Robert Vasquez (KO 9), Charlie Nash (an off-the-floor KO 4) and especially touted Americans Howard Davis Jr. (UD 15) and Sean O'Grady (a blood-soaked KO 12). But Watt's thudding jab and evolved boxing brain were still no match for Arguello, who, at 29, was nearly four years younger, three inches taller and owned an even better jab and a vaster storehouse of knowledge thanks to his 71 previous pro fights, 26 more than Watt. Arguello, fresh off a 27-month reign at 130 that saw him record eight successful defenses (including victories over successors Rafael "Bazooka" Limon, Bobby Chacon and Rolando Navarrete), used his razor-sharp punches to slice and swell Watt's face and his long hook to score the fight's only knockdown in Round 7. Though Watt bravely mounted a late rally, Arguello's overall command was rewarded with a suitably rendered unanimous decision (147-143 twice, 147-137).

"I think I beat one of the great champions," Arguello said. "I hit him with my best punches, but he just wouldn't go down or quit."

Watt, the picture of class before, during and after, cheekily said the following: "I'm in the car business, and, if I had to do an estimate of my face, I think I would treat it as a write-off."

NOVEMBER 21, 1987: JULIO CESAR CHAVEZ TKO 11 EDWIN ROSARIO – LAS VEGAS HILTON, LAS VEGAS

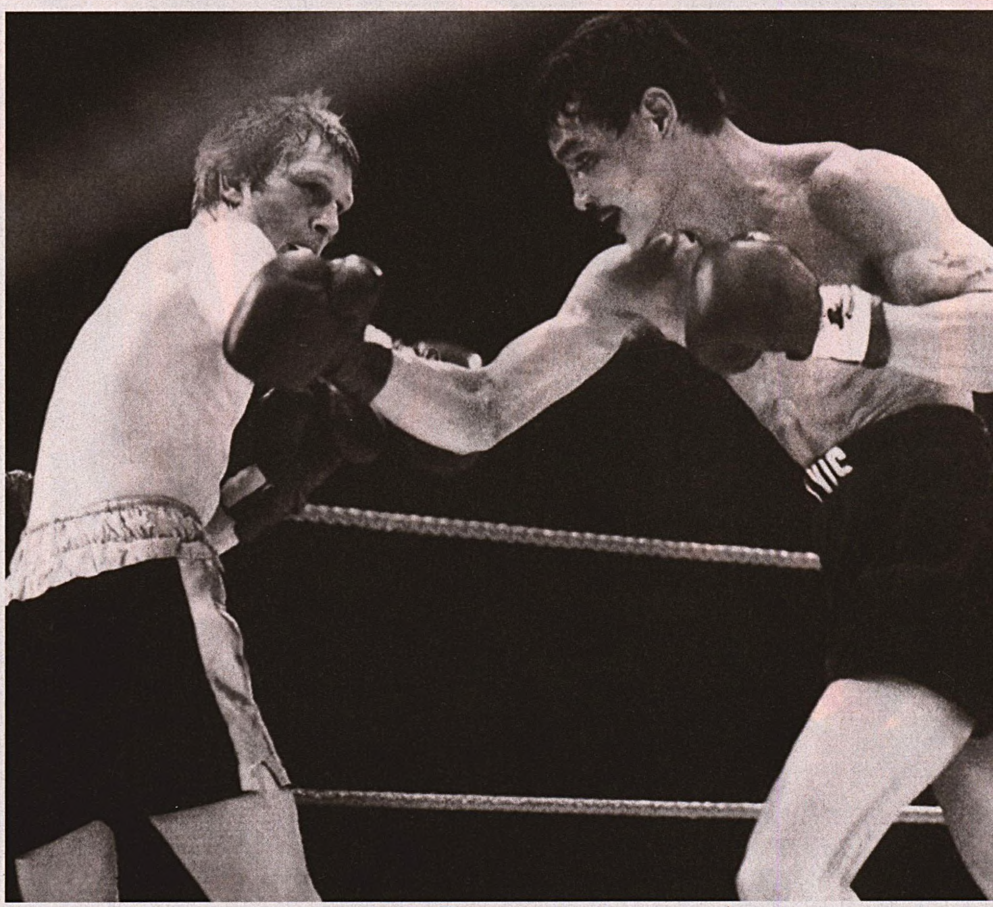
Chavez tore such a destructive path during his three-year, nine-defense reign as WBC junior lightweight king that many observers clamored for him to make the jump to 135 long before he signed to fight WBA lightweight champion Edwin Rosario. Once he made the long talked-about move official, however, Chavez proceeded to make the wait more than worth it.

The 24-year-old Rosario was making the second defense of his second lightweight reign, a reign that began with a scorching two-round knockout over Livingstone Bramble that was considered a monstrous upset at the time. Against Chavez (56-0, 45 KOs), the 31-2 (27 KOs) Rosario again was deemed an underdog (an 8-to-5 dog, to be exact). A defiant Rosario proclaimed, "I'll knock him out by the 10th round. If he comes to me, that will make it easier. If he does that, I'll knock him out by the third round."

Chavez countered by saying, "Rosario quit against Jose Luis Ramirez (in their second fight, in which Ramirez stopped Rosario in four to win the WBC lightweight title), and I will make him quit too."

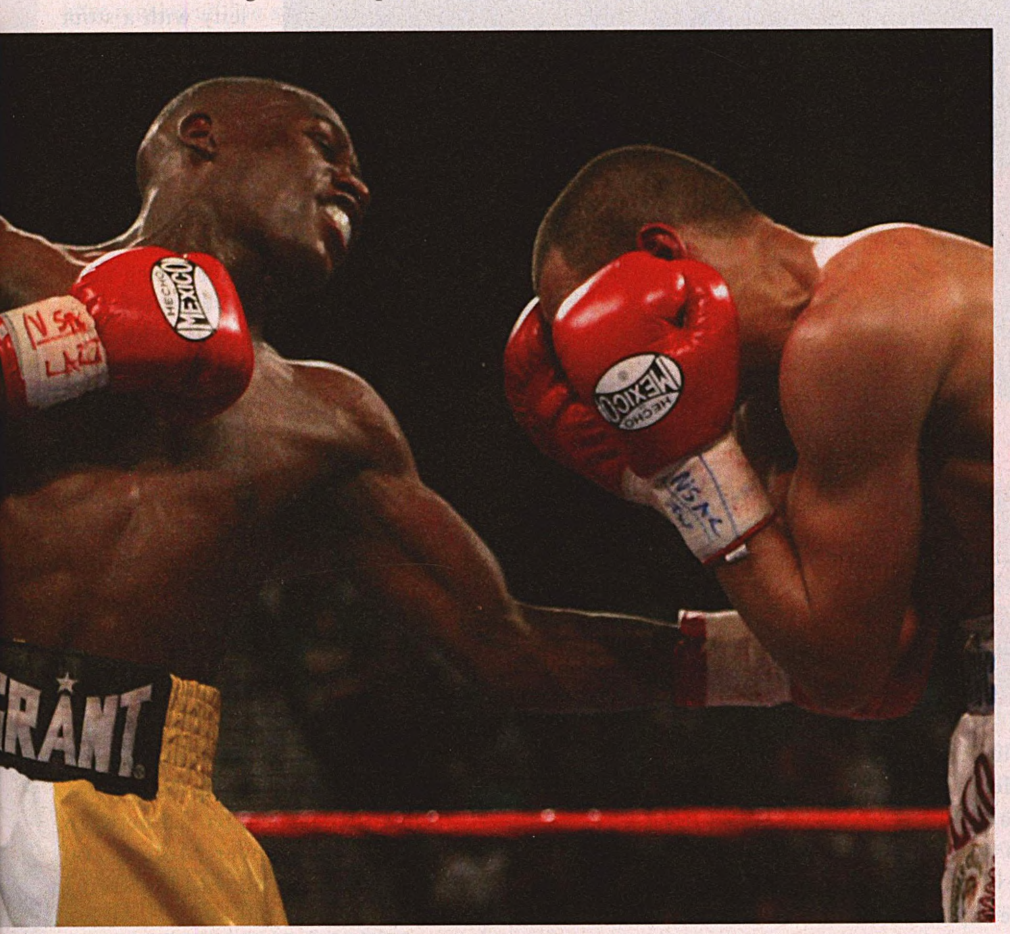
Rosario tried his best to back up his words, but Chavez forced Rosario to eat them – as well as plenty of leather.

Despite the frosty desert-night temperature at the Hilton's outdoor arena, Chavez was as hot as a fighter could be as he muscled Rosario toward the ropes, kept him there with hammering hooks and uppercuts and



Alexis Arguello (right) was known for his fight-ending power at featherweight and junior lightweight, but he had to settle for a decision victory against lightweight beltholder Jim Watt.

speared him with accurate head shots that gashed his lip, bloodied his nose, cut his right eye and slammed his left orb shut. Chavez's beating continued despite hurting his right hand in the fifth, but his pain couldn't compare to that felt by Rosario, who hung tough until Richard Steele intervened at the 2:38 mark of Round 11. With that victory, Chavez announced himself as boxing's latest superstar.



Floyd Mayweather Jr. (left) won the WBC lightweight title with a unanimous decision over Jose Luis Castillo in Las Vegas, but many believe it was a hometown decision.

Will Lomachenko do the same against Linares?

APRIL 20, 2002: FLOYD MAYWEATHER JR. UD 12 JOSE LUIS CASTILLO I – MGM GRAND, LAS VEGAS

Through his first 27 fights, Mayweather, then called "Pretty Boy," had done everything expected of him since turning pro 5½ years earlier – and then some. In fight 18 he forced the respected Genaro Hernandez to retire on his stool after eight rounds, and over the next three years he notched eight title defenses, including a smashing second-round TKO over Angel Manfredy that capped off a run earning him THE RING's 1998 Fighter of the Year award. Now he was attempting the next step in his master plan by meeting WBC lightweight king Jose Luis Castillo, a rugged 12-year veteran who overcame four early KO defeats to dethrone Stevie Johnston, fight him to a draw in the rematch and come into the Mayweather fight on a four-fight KO streak that extended his unbeaten run to 12-0-1.

Mayweather not only was a 4-to-1 favorite, his star power enabled him to make twice as much money as the defending champion ($2.2 million to $1.1 million). But in the ring, at least on this night, Castillo was more than Mayweather's equal as his physicality enabled him to close the gap, attack Mayweather's body and land power punches with unusually high frequency (46 percent, according to CompuBox). Mayweather's savvy and quicker reflexes helped him fend off Castillo, but the champ succeeded in creating the brawl he wanted. The evidence: Referee Vic Drakulich deducted points from both – Castillo for hitting on the break in Round 8 and Mayweather for elbowing in the 10th.

According to CompuBox, Castillo outlanded Mayweather 203-157 overall, the only time Mayweather has been bested in the 50 fights tracked by the company. HBO's Harold Lederman scored the bout 115-111 for Castillo, but the three official judges saw Mayweather not only a winner, but a decisive one (116-111, 115-111 twice). That controversy led to a rematch, which Mayweather won convincingly.

JUNE 28, 2008: MANNY PACQUIAO KO 9 DAVID DIAZ – MANDALAY BAY EVENTS CENTER, LAS VEGAS

Like the previous three fights profiled, Pacquiao was favored to beat the defending lightweight champion, not because the titlist was lacking in any significant way, but because the smaller man possessed talents that transcended weight. Such was certainly the case with Pacquiao, a four-division dynamo fresh off a split-decision victory over Juan Manuel Marquez and, despite his age (29) and experience (13½ years, 51 fights), was actually getting better thanks to vastly improved footwork and the right hook taught to him by trainer Freddie Roach. While no one

questioned Pacquiao's talent and proficiency, observers wondered how he would adjust to fighting at 135 for the first time.

David Diaz, though a solid 5-to-1 underdog, was no slouch. The three-time National Golden Gloves champion earned his spot on the 1996 U.S. Olympic team by defeating Zab Judah twice in eight days, and the Chicago southpaw entered the Pacquiao fight on an 8-0-1 roll that included an upset victory over Erik Morales to keep his WBC lightweight title.

Once the bell sounded, the gap between Diaz, the solid professional, and Pacquiao, the burgeoning global legend, was immediate and graphic. Pacquiao's dazzling footwork created the angles and his flashing fists gashed the bridge of Diaz's nose in Round 2 while also bruising and swelling the left side of the champion's face. An accidental butt in the fourth cut the area above Diaz's right eye and the injuries were severe enough to prompt several medical time-outs. Diaz's courage kept him upright through eight rounds, but a crushing left cross late in the ninth drove the Chicagoan to the floor and caused Vic Drakulich to call an immediate halt.

How vicious was the beating? According to CompuBox, Pacquiao outlanded Diaz 45-10 in the final two rounds. The final margins were even wider: 230-90 overall, 50-31 jabs and 180-59 power punches. Those numbers only confirmed what millions of eyes already knew: Manny Pacquiao was the most dynamic fighter walking the earth.

NOVEMBER 17, 2012: ADRIEN BRONER KO 8 ANTONIO DEMARCO – BOARDWALK HALL, ATLANTIC CITY

With Floyd Mayweather Jr. in the latter stages of a stellar career, Adrien Broner saw himself as the next incarnation of the man known as "Money." The package he projected certainly fit the bill: Inside the ring he had the fast hands, the quick feet, the jolting punches and the undefeated record, while outside the ropes he owned the flashy jewelry, the fancy cars, and, for better or worse, the knack for getting noticed. Broner's nickname was "The Problem" for his ability to confound opponents, but that moniker also applied to his troubles outside the ring. Broner's WBO title reign at 130 was cut short when he failed to make weight against Vicente Escobedo, but his performances against Vicente Rodriguez in winning the belt vacated by Ricky Burns (KO 3) and in blowing out Eloy Perez in four convinced many that, despite his emotional immaturity, Broner was a quickly rising tide that could turn into a fistic tsunami.

Adrien Broner's blend of speed, power and technique overwhelmed defending WBC lightweight titleholder Antonio DeMarco (right) in eight rounds.

Four months after the debacle against Escobedo, whom he crushed in five rounds to up his record to 24-0 (20 KOs), Broner turned his attention to WBC lightweight king Antonio DeMarco, a tall lefty with a stout chin who showed off his never-say-die attitude by stopping the heavily favored Jorge Linares in the 11th round after losing most of the first 10. After that he stopped Miguel Roman in five, then scored a 44-second knockout against John Molina. In terms of brevity, DeMarco-Molina replaced Tony Canzoneri's 66-second KO over Al Singer in 1930 as the fastest knockout in lightweight championship history.

Only 69 days had passed between DeMarco's win over Molina and the Broner fight, but inside the ring the difference could be measured in eons. Broner's sonic left hands and whistling crosses and uppercuts made mincemeat out of DeMarco's defense, and the fifth round was so lopsided – Broner outlanded DeMarco 54-7 overall and connected on 52 of his 78 power shots (67 percent) – that it could have been scored 10-8 even though a knockdown wasn't scored.

Broner continued to pound away in the sixth and seventh before a left uppercut finally floored DeMarco, a sight that prompted the Mexican's corner to throw in the towel.

...And Five That Failed:

NOVEMBER 20, 1931: KID CHOCOLATE L 15 TONY CANZONERI – MADISON SQUARE GARDEN, NEW YORK:

"The Cuban Bon Bon," whose quick-twitch skills had carried him to a 67-3-1 (36 KOs) record, had won the 130-pound title from Benny Bass four months earlier, but after running off five straight wins (three by KO) he opted to challenge Canzoneri, who held both the lightweight and junior welterweight belts. Though Chocolate stunned Canzoneri in Round 2, the Italian-American's aggression and somewhat harder punches enabled him to win a split decision. An interesting fact: Had Canzoneri, who weighed 132, shed an extra two pounds, he could have claimed two historic distinctions. First, because Chocolate scaled 127½, Canzoneri could have claimed the Cuban's 130-pound belt and become history's first simultaneous triple champion seven years before Henry Armstrong. Second, because Canzoneri had previously held the featherweight title, he also would have been boxing's first four-division champion 56 years before Thomas Hearns. Best yet, Canzoneri would have achieved both honors in the "one champ per weight class" era. While Canzoneri is considered one of boxing's best, how much higher would his standing be had he scaled 130 or below against Chocolate?

FEBRUARY 15, 1964: GABRIEL "FLASH" ELORDE KO BY 14 CARLOS ORTIZ – RIZAL MEMORIAL SPORTS COMPLEX, MANILA:

Since winning the 130-pound title from Harold Gomes in August 1960, Elorde not only had registered four defenses of his junior lightweight belt, he had also defended, lost and regained the OPBF lightweight title, so he was no stranger to fighting at the higher weight. Before more than 50,000 countrymen, Elorde opened a cut over Ortiz's right eye in Round 2 and competed evenly over the first 10 rounds. The Filipino's best moments came in Rounds 6 and 7 thanks to effective right hands, but Ortiz blunted the rallies with timely clinches. Ortiz turned on the afterburners starting in the 11th and, according to RING founder (and ringside judge) Nat Fleischer, Ortiz "gave the local scrapper a thorough trouncing." The pair met again in November 1966 at Madison Square Garden, and while Ortiz again scored a 14th-round TKO, the fight was nowhere near as competitive, as Ortiz led 13-0, 12-1 and 11-2 on the judges' scorecards.

JANUARY 14, 1984: BOBBY CHACON KO BY 3 RAY MANCINI – LAWLOR EVENTS CENTER, RENO, NEVADA:

Mancini's heartwarming story of pursuing, then winning a lightweight title for the father who was denied his own title shot due to World War II made "Boom Boom" a TV darling. But if there was one fighter who could turn Ray into the bad guy, it was Chacon, who was on the roll of a lifetime. Seven years after carelessly losing the featherweight title to Ruben Olivares, Chacon, in his third attempt to reacquire a belt, won the WBC junior lightweight title from old rival Rafael "Bazooka" Limon, thanks to a knockdown in the waning seconds. Moreover, Chacon followed what was to be THE RING's 1982 Fight of the Year with THE RING's 1983 Fight of the Year, a stirring twice-off-the-floor points win over previous conqueror (and heavy favorite) Cornelius Boza-Edwards. Unfortunately for the 32-year-old "Schoolboy," he no longer had the magic touch against Mancini, who was making the fourth defense of the belt he won from Art Frias. The bigger, stronger and harder-hitting Mancini relentlessly pounded Chacon into an unpopular but properly rendered third-round stoppage by referee Richard Steele. Incidentally, the Chacon fight was the final win of Mancini's career, as he lost his final four fights to Livingstone Bramble (twice), Hector Camacho and Greg Haugen, but the good news is that both he and Chacon were eventually enshrined in Canastota.

MAY 19, 1990: AZUMAH NELSON L 12 PERNELL WHITAKER – CAESARS PALACE, LAS VEGAS:

Since Nelson's breakout performance against Salvador Sanchez in July 1982 (a stirring KO loss in 15), the 31-year-old Ghanaian proved his pedigree by winning the WBC featherweight belt from Wilfredo Gomez, then – after notching six successful defenses – capturing the vacant WBC junior lightweight title and recording four more defenses to stretch his win streak to 19 fights across nearly eight years. Meanwhile, Whitaker, a 1984 Olympic gold medalist, was near the top of the pound-for-pound rankings, the owner of two lightweight belts and, at 26, at the peak of his powers. Better yet, the match offered a pleasing style contrast: Whitaker the supreme boxer, Nelson the intelligent slugger. But this dream match proved to be a disappointment as Whitaker's lateral movement and sublime skill neutralized Nelson's enthusiastic but ineffective aggression. The only flaw in Whitaker's performance took place when Mills Lane took a point in the final round for Whitaker repeatedly wrapping his arm around Nelson's leg and trying to lift it off the floor. No matter: Whitaker won by closer-than-reality scores of 116-111, 115-113 and 116-114.

SEPTEMBER 9, 1995: GENARO HERNANDEZ KO BY 6 OSCAR DE LA HOYA – CAESARS PALACE, LAS VEGAS:

While Nelson was being hailed by most as the best 130-pounder on the planet, "Chicanito" was assembling a resume worthy of respect. Since winning the vacant WBA belt against Daniel Londas in November 1991, Hernandez had recorded eight successful defenses, including back-to-back victories over former two-division titlist Raul "Jibaro" Perez. Days after impressively stopping former featherweight titlist Jorge Paez in a non-title affair, Hernandez vacated his belt to pursue a fight against WBO lightweight king and "Golden Boy" Oscar De La Hoya. Bad: Although the fight was billed as a Los Angeles turf war, the bout took place in Las Vegas. Worse: The fight itself was anticlimactic. A De La Hoya uppercut shattered a nose first injured during a sparring session with Shane Mosley two weeks earlier. The resulting breathing difficulties forced Hernandez to tell Richard Steele he was unable to continue. Entering the seventh, De La Hoya was ahead 59-55 on two cards and 58-56 on the third.

HUMBLE CONQUEROR

KATIE TAYLOR ISN'T REALLY INTO BEING A STAR – JUST BEATING EVERYBODY STANDING IN HER WAY TO THE TOP

By **Thomas Gerbasi**

The storyline could've been perfect: Katie Taylor travels from her home in Ireland to train in the United States, punching faces and bags at the Manchester ROCS Boxing Club in Connecticut by night, only to walk across the alley to the Parish of Saint Teresa of Calcutta to pray during the day.

There were just a couple problems with that scenario. Taylor is Christian, not Catholic, and her church is in the Connecticut town she lives in, Vernon. The rest works, but, well, there goes that storyline.

"Sorry," laughs Taylor. "It's a good story, actually."

The reality may be even better when it comes to the WBA lightweight champion.

In a social media age, she is refreshingly low-key. In a sport where mean mugging and intimidation are celebrated, she has a smile and laugh so expressive that it takes over her entire face. And when it comes to playing the angles in a sport that has turned safety-first at the negotiation table, Taylor has issued a manifesto – politely, of course – that she will face all comers until she rules the sport.

"When I did turn pro, I was adamant that I was gonna take big fights," she said. "The worst thing about professional boxing for me is that people aren't willing to take risks and aren't willing to take the big fights and they're so concerned about the zero on their record. I wasn't gonna be that fighter. I was gonna take all the big fights out there and I was gonna take risks, and that's what women's boxing needs."

Forget women's boxing; that's what *boxing* needs.

Owner of an 8-0 record since turning pro in November 2016, Taylor already has a world title that she's successfully defended once, and the 31-year-old Olympic champ will attempt to add another 135-pound belt to her collection when she tackles Argentina's Victoria Noelia Bustos on the Daniel Jacobs-Maciej Sulecki undercard at Barclays Center on April 28.

It's the schedule and level of challenge that she wanted, and she's getting to do it on her own terms, far away from her home in Bray, Ireland. »

Katie Taylor celebrates after winning the vacant WBA lightweight title with a one-sided decision over Anahi Esther Sanchez on October 28, 2017, in Cardiff, Wales.

Taylor's boxing skills are on "a totally different level," according to trainer Ross Enamait.

JUSTIN SETTERFIELD/GETTY IMAGES

It's easy to miss the Manchester ROCS Boxing Club, located in an alley off Main Street. But once through the doors, it's clear that this is a "real" gym. There are two rings but no juice bar. A selection of tires and a couple sledgehammers sit against the wall, replacing anything resembling high-tech gear. It's the way Taylor's coach, Ross Enamait, likes it.

"I think fighters are doing too much of the extra stuff," he said. "They do so much stuff out here, they don't do enough in there (points to the ring). Roberto Duran and Marvin Hagler didn't need that. The exercises, heart rate monitors; you know if you're in shape when you spar."

This old-school approach is what led Taylor to investigate Enamait's methods through his books long before they started working together. He was the first and only coach the 2012 Olympic gold medalist contacted when she had reached a crossroads in her life and career following her loss to Finland's Mira Potkonen in the 2016 Rio Games.

"I had a really bad year in the amateurs in 2016, and after that I realized I needed the change," said Taylor. "I got in touch with Ross and asked if I could come over for a few weeks for a training camp. Thankfully, he obliged. I came over and I just loved every second of it. In those three weeks I saw the improvements in myself and I felt like I was getting stronger, and we gelled straight away. I knew he was the right coach for me."

Enamait agrees, even if he needed a little convincing.

"I didn't even know much about her, to be honest with you," he laughs. "I had heard her name but I really had no idea."

But once Taylor got into the ring to spar with a local pro, Enamait was sold.

"She boxed his ears off," he said. "I saw that she can fight. She's a totally different level."

That's evident watching Taylor in the gym on an unseasonably warm February afternoon three days before a major nor'easter hit the state. Even this early on in her camp for Bustos, she's sharp and seemingly fight-ready, and in stark contrast to many boxers who tend to either bounce while doing pad work or try to mimic Floyd Mayweather's showboating displays, there are no wasted motions or punches when Taylor and Enamait work eight fast-paced rounds. The result is slick footwork that sets up punches that sound like shotgun blasts resonating through the empty gym.

At round's end, when Enamait gives her water, Taylor may be the only fighter in history who says, "Thank you." She's tired, but comfortable with the hard work. She's home.

No one can understand what it means to be Katie Taylor in Ireland.

A boxer since the age of 11, she quickly got accustomed to breaking barriers. She fought in the first sanctioned female boxing match in Ireland at 15, became the country's first female world amateur boxing champion in 2006, and six years later, in the first Olympics to allow women's boxing, she won a gold medal.

She was a national hero and superstar. And she wasn't ready for everything that followed.

"At times it wore me down, especially coming back from the London Olympics," Taylor said. "I kind of got overwhelmed by it all. I was in my own little bubble in London and I didn't realize how big it was back home. And it hit me when I was home and I just needed to get away from it for a while."

Expected to repeat in Rio, it was an omen of things to come when she dropped bouts in 2016 to Azerbaijan's Yana Alekseevna and France's Estelle Mossely, her first losses since 2011. Then she lost in Rio, but wasn't sure if the pro game was next.

"I think it would have been a lot safer for me to stay amateur, because you're getting a grant every year and there's a lot of money in the amateur game back home," she said. "But I would have been miserable in the amateur game. I was becoming so stale in the sport and I just needed a fresh new start."

Those first weeks in Connecticut were a strong push toward the punch-for-pay ranks. A meeting with promoter Eddie Hearn sealed the deal. The Irish star was moving into the pros and moving to America. It's a place where she can be Katie Taylor and not have to be KATIE TAYLOR.

"There's something freeing about that," she said. "I love the fact that I'm anonymous over here and I can go for walks and stuff like that. I definitely lived a very quiet life when I'm at home in Ireland as well, but I do love that I can just be myself over here."

Outside the Manchester ROCS Boxing Club, there's a banner announcing that the gym is the home of unbeaten rising star Mykquan Williams, and inside there's another banner for veteran pro Matt Remillard. Why no banner for Katie Taylor?

"I don't want a banner," she smiles, and she means it. It's almost as if Taylor is bobbing and weaving from the attention usually afforded to world champions, opting to focus on her craft and her quest to dominate her sport, something that she will have the opportunity to do with dance partners such as Delfine Persoon, Natasha Jonas, Chantelle Cameron and Mikaela Mayer around her. Sure, she misses her family and friends in Ireland, but the rest she can do without.

"Thankfully I found a great group of people, I have a good church over here and that's really all I need. The training part was always very solid, but I have a great life over here now, which is very important, and I definitely think it suits my personality being over here."

But Taylor has the potential to be a game-changer for women's boxing. With that comes the responsibility to be the face of the sport as well. Will she accept that role?

"I definitely would love to bring the sport to another level," Taylor said. "Even though I don't find it that comfortable being involved in the media side of things, I definitely realize how important it is as well. Even throughout my whole amateur career, I've always kind of broke boundaries, and that's exactly what I want to do in the pro game as well. I want to make history in my sport and bring women's boxing to a place where people really respect it, and that's why it's so important to take the big fights as well, because those are the fights that people are gonna be interested in. And to bring the public along is very, very important."

That's a yes.

LAST MEN STANDING

SEMIFINAL NO. 1:
George Groves UD 12 Chris Eubank Jr.
• **Date/location:** Feb. 17, 2018, Manchester Arena, Manchester, U.K.

SEMIFINAL NO. 2:
Callum Smith UD 12 Nieky Holzken
• **Date/location:** Feb. 24, 2018, Arena Nürnberger Versicherung, Nuremberg, Germany

George Groves, WBSS partner Nisse Sauerland and Callum Smith share the ring shortly after Smith outpointed Nieky Holzken.

MARTIN ROSE/BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES

WORLD BOXING SUPER SERIES

THE 168-POUND SEMIFINALS OF THE WORLD BOXING SUPER SERIES HAVE ENDED, AND A BAD SHOULDER IS THE ONLY THING THAT CAN SPOIL THE RIDE NOW

By **Gareth A Davies**

Tournaments in boxing are the business. Especially when they work. The format brings together those we want to see fight in a shorter span. We know the who, the how, the why, the when and the where – back to back to back. All the ingredients fans, writers and analysts need to get excited about scheduled fights.

As someone who covered the great Showtime Super Six series at super middleweight, which concluded in 2011 with the emergence of Andre Ward after his victory over Carl Froch, the anticipation of seeing another tournament capture the public's imagination was strong. That one took too long to play out. This one, thus far, has brought a conveyor belt of thrills and few spills.

Indeed, in this case, the World Boxing Super Series, at both cruiserweight and super middleweight, has proven to be an inspired concept, though largely European in content by the time we reached the semifinals. The only major disappointment was that there was no television deal for the USA, which, for various reasons, made sense, but it's something that needs to be put right if there are to be more of these divisional fight-offs.

Tournament owners, working under the consortium banner Comosa AG, had put together the right format and the right lucre – $50 million in purse money – for the two divisional battles. Thankfully, it has worked, with the cruiserweight final between Oleksandr Usyk and Murat Gassiev set to be a thriller in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on May 11. As

THE RING went to press, there was an effort underway to bend the rules to allow more time for No. 1 super middleweight seed George Groves, the WBA titleholder who dislocated his shoulder in the semifinals on February 17, to be fit for the final this summer, against Liverpool's Callum Smith.

The cruiserweight tournament will end with an authentic No. 1. Everyone goes home happy. Bingo. Let's hope the same happens with the super middles.

So ... to those semifinals for the 168-pound fighters. We had four of the top 10-ranked boxers in the world. We had three British fighters. And one German. Or so we thought, until just six days before the second semifinal, when Juergen Braehmer withdrew. Tournaments are great when there are no lasting injuries, fighters turn up on weight and the thing moves on. Yet there is so much that can go wrong. On the surface it appeared to be a disaster, yet up stepped an 11th-hour hero in Nieky Holzken, a decorated Dutch kickboxer with a 13-0 boxing record. Still, the super middleweight semifinals did not disappoint. Indeed, with the name of the Muhammad Ali Trophy at the end of it, this thing just could not disappoint.

Groves against Chris Eubank Jr. generated a lot of noise, had a long build-up, and was widely anticipated. The Manchester Arena sold out quickly, well in advance. Had it not been for this tournament, they would likely have never met in a ring. They were both brilliant advocates for their own causes.

Groves went quietly about his preparation, having seen attrition to his status following two failed title attempts against Froch. Groves was older, wiser, quieter and, rightfully, the No. 1 seed. Eubank, using social media, engineered and campaigned vigorously, putting out Rocky-style videos of his speed and power. His father, Chris Eubank Sr., was as controversial as ever, calling on the referee to show mercy and stop the bout if Groves was in trouble. It was canny stuff.

Groves and Smith entered the WBSS super middleweight tournament as the top two seeds.

As the fight grew close, the two protagonists were equally compelling in separate sit-downs with the national newspapers, neither man showing a chink in his self-belief. They came alone, too, without an entourage. Eubank Sr. was absent for Junior's appearance because he had influenza. The debate was endless. It was intriguing, too. Groves acted fairly bemused by it all, but he never took his eye off the ball. Not once. Having had close to 200 rounds of sparring with Eubank in the past, he knew he was in for a tough physical battle. But not a tough boxing challenge.

Yet the hype train careered on for Eubank. He had been called "the next generation Eubank," "a machine," as the 28-year-old followed in the footsteps of his eccentric father, the former middleweight and long-reigning super middleweight titleholder. There were the tales of him taking a beating from Cuban super heavyweight amateur Erislandy Savon – "I took my beating like a man" – and of his imperviousness to pain. And at the heart of his self-confidence was the fact that he knew – yes, he knew, he told us – that he could break 29-year-old Groves. That he would "ice" him.

Yet try as he might, Eubank was unable to draw Groves out of his shell and into a war of words. Strangely, the fight split many boxing insiders in the U.K. So many were picking, one suspects, on the physicality and confidence espoused by Eubank and the undeniable prowess the name implies in British boxing.

The bookmakers even installed Eubank as the marginal favorite. Would Groves crack under the onslaught? Was this the moment for Eubank to emerge onto the world scene and make his mark?

Three weeks before the contest, I had breakfast in Oakland with Andre Ward, and his view summed up why this fight, and why the tournament format, makes the heart beat faster and accelerates the process of creating emerging stars.

"Any tournament format causes the best to fight the best," offered Andre. "I wonder where my career would have gone if I wasn't in the Super Six. I wouldn't have been able to fight that many big names in succession like that. That's unheard of."

SMITH: MARTIN RUSE/BUNGARTS/GETTY IMAGES; GROOVES: PETER BYRNE/PA WIRE

Ward was intrigued by the Groves-Eubank matchup. "The fight is good. It's a question of what Groves has left. I think he has to prove that to himself. Who better to do that against than a guy with the buzz Eubank has? Eubank has to keep the train on the track. He has to keep winning impressively to back up his father's talk. I just sit back and watch. The hype is good for the media and the fans, but the reality is the fighter doesn't know how good he is until he's on that big stage."

So, after all the razzamatazz, the light show, the smoke plumes, the gladiatorial platforms set up to parade the warriors outside the ring – the WBSS has done this quite differently – the fighters took to their corners in Manchester. There was huge support for Groves, catcalls and whistles for Eubank.

The fight lived up to all expectations. It was a thriller. Physically, if not technically. Groves was just a step too far ahead, too long, too strong and ultimately too technical and experienced for Eubank. He proved that the hype surrounding Junior and his imperviousness to both pain and punches was indeed unjustified.

Referee Michael Alexander had a busy night. Groves took the early rounds, commanding with his jab and movement, leading the fray until Eubank, cut near his right eyebrow by a clash of heads in the third, began to bull his way into the fight. He was strong, he was game, and although he fought valiantly to the last, he was just too raw to finish an exhausted Groves. Eubank, lacking footwork to close Groves down, had to throw himself at his opponent to get close and was tied up time and again by the world champion, who had clearly done all his homework with trainer Shane McGuigan. Groves made Eubank look like a brawler, but in a dramatic final stanza, Groves dislocated his left shoulder, clinging on for the final two minutes.

It was scored 117-112, 116-112 and 115-113 by the three British judges. But it wasn't really that close.

The next morning, Groves, his arm in a sling, said that it made no sense to hold the final without him. "I am the No. 1 seed in the tournament. I'm the only legitimate world champion in this tournament, so who wants to watch the WBSS final without me in it? If the dates need to be changed slightly, then I am sure they will do so," said Groves, who thought the fight had "a bit of everything."

"Eubank was covered in claret (blood), which always looks good for the cameras. I got a little cut at the end and the shoulder popped out, so the narrative was there." But, he added, "I am not going to waste energy explaining to people how boxing works. In a fitness test he would beat me, but on fight night that means nothing. I am more efficient, bigger and better. I old-manned him out of it." Enough said, and no gloating from Groves. He didn't need to. Social media and the boxing world critiqued and attacked Eubank. Fellow British fighters and world champions warned that Eubank Jr. should return to middleweight, find a trainer and develop. Tony Bellew said he needed to develop "from brawler into boxer."

Prince Naseem Hamed, working on television on ITV's broadcast, went even further: "He should retire immediately" was his advice, because "he does not have the ability" to box. It was a brutal beatdown.

★★★

The following week, the WBSS circus tent moved to Bavaria. Callum Smith flew out from Liverpool with trainer Joe Gallagher, and almost as his feet touched the ground, he knew he would not be fighting Juergen Braehmer, a tricky veteran southpaw expected to be the most taxing test of his unbeaten career. Just a few days prior to the bell, he learned it would be Holzken instead.

It was held in Nuremberg, just a stone's throw from the old Nazi Party rally grounds. A strange eeriness still pervades, as the German authorities have left the place largely untouched – simplistic boards explaining a period in time, a monument to this never happening again.

In this setting, Smith's 24th victory will not be the most memorable or the most rewarding of his career, but it could be the most significant, as he advanced to the WBSS final with a landslide points victory.

Smith handed the 34-year-old Dutchman his first career defeat in his 14th fight, and although written off as the underdog going into this contest, the former kickboxer and Muay Thai fighter with 70 knockouts in 105 bouts made it an entertaining scrap. Holzken said he would "give everything" with this step-up opportunity, and indeed he did, as Smith found himself unable to budge his teak-tough opponent.

Smith controlled the contest behind the jab for the first two-thirds of the fight, opening up with hooks to the body and chin of the durable Dutchman as the fight progressed. He won virtually every round, yet was unable to dent the defiant fighter known as "The Natural," whose advancing, heavy-pressure strategy included eating shots to land with his own. It left questions about whether Smith has genuine power at world level.

Job done, Smith's promoter, Eddie Hearn, told me that "it made no sense at all" if the tournament final was not delayed for Smith and Groves to meet. "It would be ridiculous," said Hearn, who is an advisory-panel member of the WBSS. "The fight everyone wants to see is Groves vs. Smith, and it would be a travesty if the organizers don't make sure Groves is fit and ready."

Let's hope sense prevails. Because there is a record in boxing of just that not happening.

BLINDSIDED

THE CONTINGENCY PLANS FOR **CANELO-GGG** NEVER INCLUDED THE STAR TESTING POSITIVE FOR DRUGS

By **Wallace Matthews**

Will they or won't they?

That is the question surrounding the highly anticipated middleweight championship rematch between Gennady Golovkin and Canelo Alvarez in the wake of Alvarez's two positive drug tests for the banned substance clenbuterol and his subsequent temporary suspension by the Nevada Athletic Commission.

Will they or won't they fight, as scheduled, on May 5 at the T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas?

The odds are that they will eventually fight again, but maybe not on Cinco de Mayo weekend.

At press time, it had yet to be determined whether the commission would lift Alvarez's suspension and allow the rematch to go forward. On March 24, Bob Bennett, the commission's executive director, hit Canelo with a temporary 10-day suspension for the violation, but the real determination of whether the fight would proceed was not expected until a special April 10 hearing, or at the next full commission meeting, set for April 18.

That meant that both Canelo and Golovkin could be in limbo, training for a fight that might yet be postponed, just 17 days before the scheduled date.

"This has happened in the UFC before, but I don't ever recall it happening with a boxing match," Bennett told THE RING.

But that was about all he would say. Same goes for Eric Gomez, representing Golden Boy, Canelo's promoter. Both Bennett and Gomez said they were operating under a strict gag order imposed by Nevada deputy attorney general Caroline Bateman not to publicly discuss the case before the hearing.

"My hands are tied here," Bennett said.

What we do know is that Canelo tested positive twice, on February 17 and February 20, for trace amounts of clenbuterol, which is not technically an anabolic steroid but has been shown to increase oxygen uptake and utilization, promote recovery, prevent muscle loss and help athletes cut weight.

Clenbuterol is on the banned-substances list of every major sports league as well as the International Olympic Committee due to its performance-enhancing effects. Previous to Canelo's positive test, boxers Erik Morales, Lucas Browne and Francisco Vargas had tested positive for clenbuterol.

According to the available information, Canelo's urine test showed "trace" amounts of the drug, and he has attributed it to contaminated meat consumed in Mexico, where he had been training. According to Dr. Daniel Eichner, who performed the test for the WADA-sanctioned lab in Salt Lake City, the test result could have been consistent with eating meat from livestock that had been fed clenbuterol. It is legal to fatten up cattle with the drug in Mexico, and the NFL has warned its players not to eat Mexican meat because of the risk of a positive test.

It is also possible that Canelo's test result was due to miscalculating the amount of time needed for his system to clear the drug; unlike the first fight, when he and GGG were subjected to drug testing within two months of the bout, this time the test was administered three months in advance, by mutual agreement of both camps.

As a result of the uncertainty, Dr. Eichner recommended further investigation to determine the reason for the presence of the drug in Canelo's urine. To that end, Bennett said Alvarez has been subjected to "random" testing and has since tested negative, although he would not say how often the tests are being administered.

In early March, Golden Boy released a statement that included the following from Canelo: "I am an athlete who respects the sport and this surprises me and bothers me because it had never happened to me. I will submit to all the tests that require me to clarify this embarrassing situation and I trust that at the end the truth will prevail."

Golovkin was buying neither Canelo's explanation nor his professions of innocence. "Again with Mexican meat? Come on, I told you, it's not Mexican meat. This is Canelo. This is his team. This is his promotion," an uncharacteristically incendiary Golovkin told a group of reporters during a roundtable interview at his training camp in Big Bear Lake, California, on March 21. "Canelo is cheating. They're using these drugs, and everybody is just trying to pretend it's not happening."

As if the controversial nature of the first bout wasn't enough – after a terrific, seesaw battle, the decision was a hotly disputed draw, with Golovkin winning 115-113 on one card, Alvarez given an absurd 118-110 edge on another and the third coming up even at 114-114 – Canelo's positive PED test added yet another layer of drama to the rematch, as well as a new level of hostility between the fighters and their enthusiastic fan bases.

The ensuing war of words between the fighters – Canelo responded to Golovkin's harsh interviews by calling GGG "a little bitch" in an Instagram post – only added to the appeal of a rematch that appeared poised to surpass the first fight, which generated $27 million at the gate and just under 1.5 million pay-per-view buys. According to Tom Loeffler, Golovkin's manager, ticket sales for the rematch were well ahead of those for the first fight.

That alone seemed to indicate that the NAC would allow the bout to proceed, as did the precedents set when both Morales (in New York) and Vargas (in California) were permitted to fight after using the "tainted meat" defense.

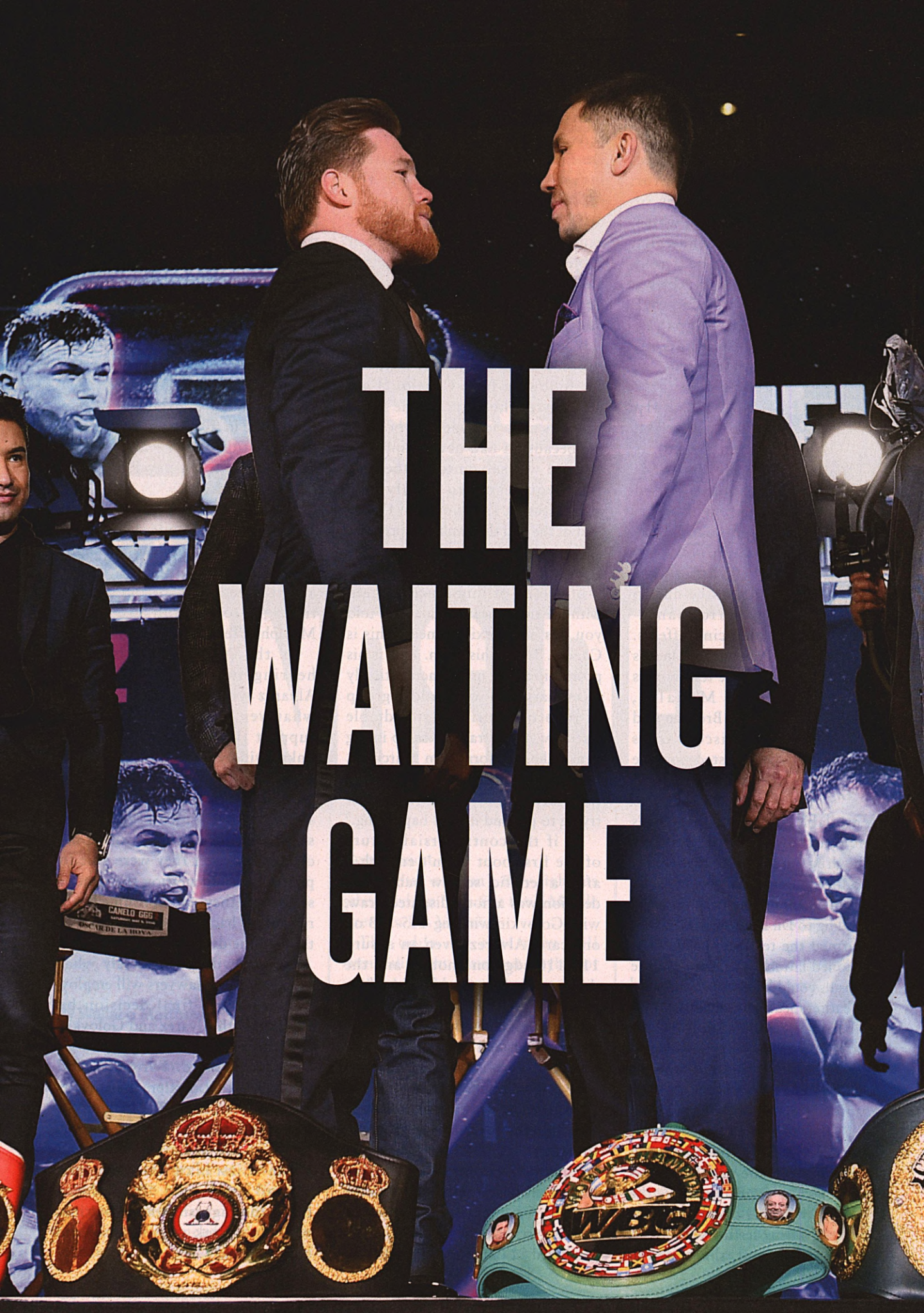
But there was also a school of thought that Nevada might take a hard line to "make an example" of Canelo, much the way Major League Baseball made an example of Alex Rodriguez in 2014, suspending him for an entire season – and costing him a $25 million paycheck – for PED violations.

There is a precedent for this as well; in 2002, Nevada declined to grant Mike Tyson a license to fight Lennox Lewis, depriving the city of a guaranteed windfall and moving the fight to the unlikely site of Memphis, Tennessee.

At the Nevada commission hearing in April, lawyers for Alvarez will undoubtedly submit whatever evidence they can to support their claim that Canelo unknowingly ingested clenbuterol from contaminated meat. Such a defense worked for five Mexican soccer players who had been suspended for testing positive for clenbuterol after they were able to produce documentation that traced some beef they had consumed in a restaurant back to a slaughterhouse that fed the drug to its livestock.

No one will say precisely what tactics Canelo's lawyers will employ, but pending a final decision by Nevada, both Alvarez and Golovkin are training as if the fight will go off as scheduled. For now. And according to Loeffler, there is no residual plan for GGG if the fight is postponed.

"Normally we have a Plan B and a Plan C, just in case anything goes wrong," Loeffler said. "But with this being the biggest fight in boxing, we didn't think we would need a backup plan." RING



THE WAITING GAME

WITH **CANELO'S** FATE RIDING ON A COMMISSION RULING OVER HIS DRUG-TEST RESULTS, **TEAM GGG** HANGS IN LIMBO AHEAD OF THE REMATCH

By **Steve Kim**

On Friday, March 23, the Nevada Athletic Commission temporarily suspended Canelo Alvarez ahead of his rematch with Gennady Golovkin, which is, as this magazine went to press, still scheduled to take place on May 5 at the T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas. This was the result of Alvarez testing positive for the banned substance clenbuterol in a pre-fight drug test administered by the the Voluntary Anti-Doping Association.

Now the Mexican star has been summoned by the NAC to appear before them on April 10.

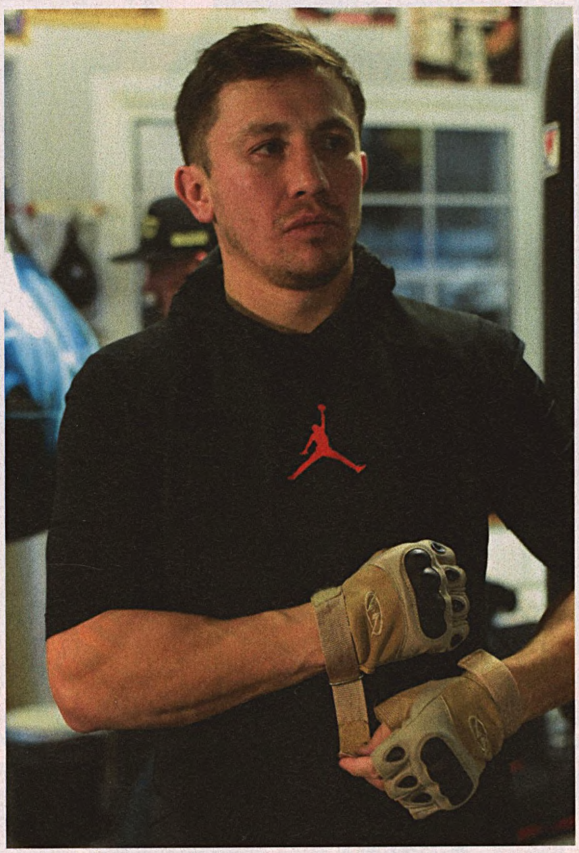
For the time being, it's business as usual for Golovkin and his side.

"Gennady's training 100 percent; nothing has changed," said Tom Loeffler, head of GGG Promotions. "I think the commission's doing a thorough investigation and we'll wait for the results on April 10th."

Loeffler wasn't necessarily surprised by the disciplinary measures handed down.

"From what I understand, that's according to the rules. If there is a positive test, then that's the procedure to go in that direction," he explained. "We're just focusing more on the Triple-G side. I know Golden Boy is looking out for the interest of Canelo. We all want this rematch to happen. We were close to a sellout this week. With all the publicity that went back and forth between Triple-G and Canelo, the fights really heating up."

He's not exaggerating. In the second time around, this matchup has some real animosity that was perhaps missing back in September. The normally mild-mannered Golovkin came out of character to voice his criticism of Alvarez – as well as skepticism toward his alibi that he was the victim of consuming contaminated meat – and Canelo responded with some profane messages to Golovkin on social media.



Canelo Alvarez's clenbuterol scandal has brought out the surly side of Gennady Golovkin's personality.

Golovkin's trainer is focused on the May 5 date, no necessarily Alvarez.

"I'm thinking we're fighting May the 5th, whether it's Canelo or somebody else. But I'm hoping we're fighting May the 5th, "Abel Sanchez, who is with GGG on a daily basis at The Summit gym in Big Bear Lake, California, told THE RING. (Middleweight contender Demetrius Andrade has offered himself as a May 5 replacement if Alvarez can't make it to the big dance, and there was speculation - mostly wishful thinking from hardcore fans - that Golovkin could face WBO titleholder Billy Joe Saunders for all the 160-pound marbles if the anticipated rematch is postponed or cancelled.)

Whoever Golovkin faces next may wish he hadn't agreed to the fight. Sanchez has noticed a subtle change in Golovkin for this camp.

"In this particular fight, May the 5th, he was more intense. I'm not going to say working harder, but you could just see his intensity. You could see he's got an edge on him. He was upset that it wasn't being take seriously," stated Sanchez, referring to Alvarez's positive drug test. "Now, by what I'm reading, obviously it's being taken a lot more seriously than maybe we thought. It's just a start, though.

"No athlete should ever be above the sport and be above the rules or have any kind of immunity or any kind of break. So the commission is taking it seriously and they're going to do something about it, and we'll see what happens."

Meanwhile, the unified middleweight titleholder is just focusing on the task at hand.

"I was very disappointed when I heard the news that Canelo had tested positive for two tests," said Golovkin. "The commission has a job to do while we wait for its decision and its findings."

When asked about the situation, Golovkin had just begun sparring the previous week for the rematch. For the time being, he was keeping it simple: "I will focus on my training with Abel in Big Bear." RING

FIGHT ROUNDUP

With a RING title and pound-for-pound bragging rights on the line, expectations were high going into the contest between Srisaket Sor Rungivisai and Juan Francisco Estrada.

BY **BRIAN HARTY**

RECENT ACTION AND FUTURE SIGNIFICANCE

SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI
MD 12
JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA

(Feb. 24, The Forum, Inglewood, Calif.)

WHAT IT LOOKED LIKE:

In March 2017, Roman "Chocolatito" Gonzalez was the No. 1 pound-for-pound fighter in the world when he stepped into the ring to face Srisaket Sor Rungvisai for the first time. Gonzalez's reign ended that night amid copious gouts of blood and criticism, the latter intentionally sprayed on the judges, but his knockout loss in the rematch was as undebatable as it gets. Then the caveats erupted: Gonzalez was in a division too high, he was too old, the wars had caught up with him ... people focused on what he'd been *before* Sor Rungvisai – who was just a former garbage-collector from Thailand, after all – wound up in the right place at the right time. As such, the truth-machine-by-proxy became the last guy to have some success against a *prime* Gonzalez – and that would be Juan Francisco Estrada.

Estrada didn't beat Gonzalez when they met back in 2012 to fight for a junior flyweight title – he lost a competitive but clear decision – but he troubled Chocolatito enough, and his record since then had been so strong that some believed he was just one Sor Rungvisai date away from his own pound-for-pound berth – not to mention the RING junior bantamweight championship.

When the bell rang for the headliner of HBO's "Superfly 2"

The showdown between Carlos Cuadras (left) and McWilliams Arroyo didn't go as most predicted it would.

event, however, it looked like it would be Chocolatito all over again. Estrada was the better boxer, clearly, just like Gonzalez had been. And just like a year earlier, the skill-gap was irrelevant because Sor Rungvisai quickly deduced that he had nothing to fear from the gloves skillfully caressing his face. The obvious power behind his own punches, meanwhile, gave every one of Estrada's attempts to get inside the cringey inevitability of a slasher-film teen wandering alone into a forest.

And then the axe never came. It turned into a hell of a fight instead, with the threat of Sor Rungvisai's jab-free avalanche countered by Estrada's less plentiful but more accurate combinations. In the 12th round the ultimate twist even seemed possible as Sor Rungvisai appeared to stagger under the hail of Estrada's power punches – nearly double the amount he'd thrown in any previous round. Luckily, 15-round fights were abolished shortly after Sor Rungvisai was born.

But enough with the caveats. It was a great fight and both men fought their hearts out, as shown by at least two of the scorecards: 115-113 and 117-111 for the winner and 114-114 even.

WHAT IT MEANS:

The cult of Srisaket is for real, the fairy tale continues. This fight was close, but not so much that people complained about the winner. A rematch is possible, and Sor Rungvisai, who is not one to dodge post-fight questions with talk about his brand, said he'd be happy to oblige. The name on most wish lists is the fellow pound-for-pounder who has announced his intent to move three pounds north, Naoya Inoue, and looking at Sor Rungvisai's rehydration weight and his power, it seems like he could easily hang at bantamweight also. Another hidden-in-plain-site gem at 118 is the No. 1-rated Zolani Tete, who could be harboring his own greatness.

MCWILLIAMS ARROYO MD 10 CARLOS CUADRAS

(Feb. 24, The Forum, Los Angeles)

Cuadras knew how to work the cameras, but Arroyo knew how to work the body. Guess which talent mattered most. Not being favored to win was understandable considering his near-two-year layoff, but Arroyo attacked Cuadras' liver like it was

GERMAN VILLASENOR

personally responsible for the insult. Same as in Sor Rungvisai-Estrada, though, the guy getting outboxed had the power to make every exchange dangerous for the twin from Puerto Rico.

Both fighters were getting buzzed, but Arroyo was winning the heated exchanges with punches almost as varied as his vocalizations – some resembled the "woop woop!" of a police car rolling up behind a perp – while Cuadras resorted mostly to swinging for a one-punch knockout. When the final bell rang, the once-beaming Mexican was suffering from the effects of abdominal abuse while Arroyo's smile revealed his own gut feeling, which was correct: scorecards of 98-92 and 97-93 in his favor and the third at 95 apiece. Sor Rungvisai, Estrada or a Cuadras rematch – the appetite for Superfly 3 is strong – could be in Arroyo's future.

DONNIE NIETES KO 7 JUAN CARLOS REVECO

(Feb. 24, The Forum, Los Angeles)

"Best-kept secret" is a phrase often used to describe Nietes, and a funny one given his belts in three divisions and the fact that he is the Philippines' longest-reigning titleholder ever. Nevertheless, Nietes is one of boxing's best-kept secrets, and the 35-year-old's methodical skill-level is testament. His jab-and-abide approach held Reveco to a connect rate of just 13 percent and may have frustrated the former titleholder from Argentina (and the crowd) into thinking they'd have to endure the equivalent of a 12-round lecture on boxing fundamentals.

Then, at the end of Round 6, Nietes unfurled another facet of his game in the shape of a vicious right hand that left his opponent stumbling back to his corner. Reveco was on the canvas not far into the seventh, and a follow-up salvo of bodyshots from Nietes summoned the all-powerful towel. Nietes, who was fighting at 112 having already won titles at 105 and 108, said afterward that he'd happily face any of the 115-pounders (specifically the winners) battling at The Forum that night.

SERGEY KOVALEV TKO 7 IGOR MIKHALKIN

(March 3, Hulu Theater at Madison Square Garden, New York)

Kovalev was once touted as boxing's next Terminator, but a pair of losses to Andre Ward and some extracurricular racism may have hurt his career a bit. This was the second step of his rebuilding process, and if the arena dead enough to hear a baby crying on the HBO broadcast was any indication, there is still work to do in reconnecting with fans.

Igor Mikhalkin and Sergey Kovalev (left) may have been old friends, but that didn't stop the Krusher from kicking his ass.

MATTHEW HEASLEY

Kovalev did his job, though, successfully defending his WBO light heavyweight title by dominating the hardworking Mikhalkin (an old friend from the amateur days) with accurate, cut-producing punches. It was never a question of who would win, but as the fight went rounds and Kovalev was getting caught a bit more than expected, the question became less "when" and more "why not yet?" Kovalev said in his post-fight interview that he just has trouble with southpaws and mentioned right-handed Badou Jack as a favored target.

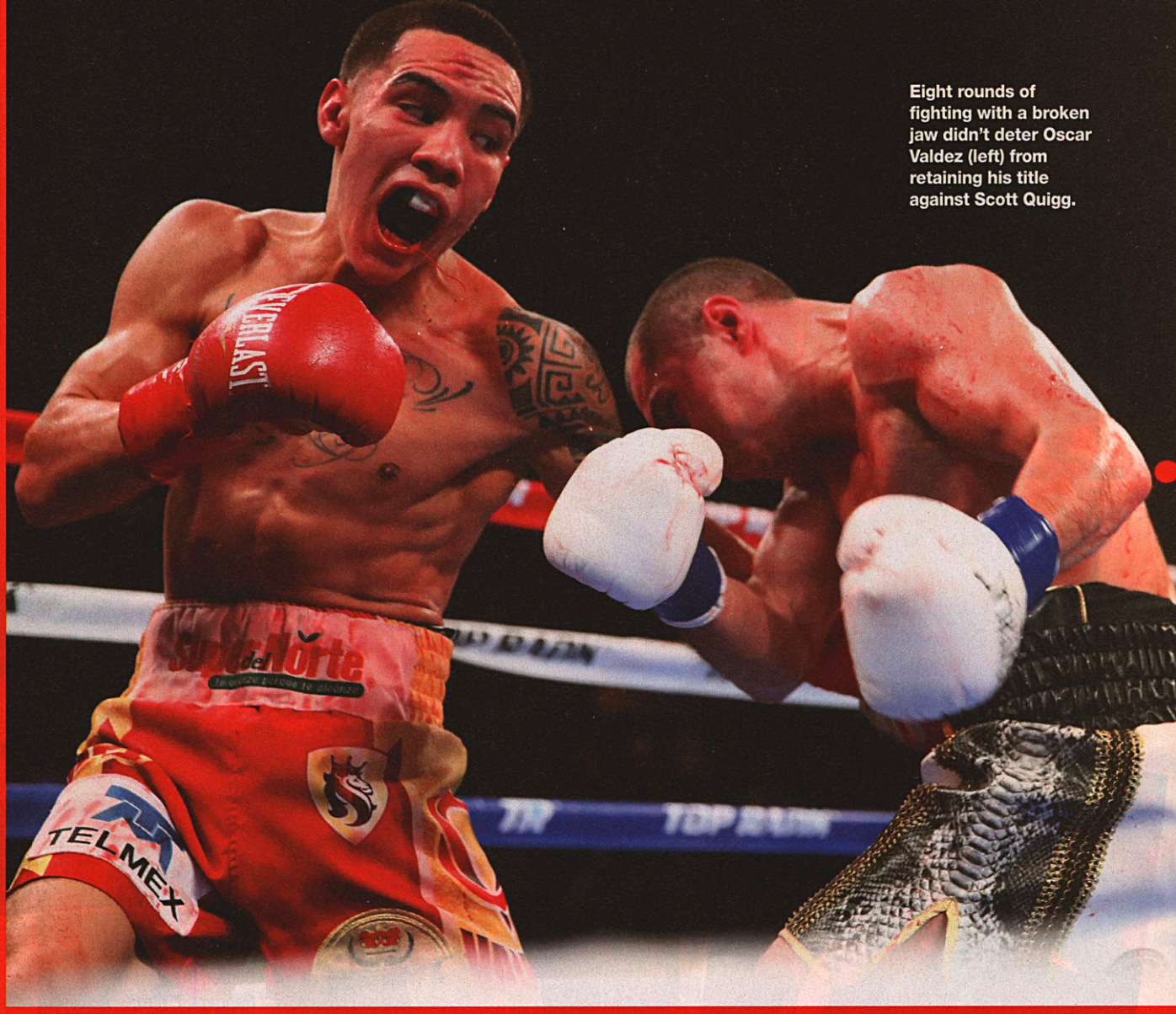
DEONTAY WILDER TKO 10 LUIS ORTIZ

(March 3, Barclays Center, Brooklyn)

The sentimental yearning for a heavyweight unification superfight is so palpable that conspiracy theorists were claiming that Wilder-Ortiz was just a fix to get the American knockout artist into the ring with British star Anthony Joshua. If the first knockdown of the fight – Ortiz down in Round 5 – had come any earlier in the round, the idea might've gained traction, as the matchup did have the feel of killing time up to that point. If Ortiz's payback – he practically had Wilder out on his feet in Round 7 – had come a bit earlier, the ending could've been truly shocking. But in both cases the fighters were saved by the bell, and the ending we got instead was the Goldilocks zone of a competitive contest with a legit if unspectacular knockout in Round 10.

As has become the usual narrative with Wilder, this fight was all about the right hand, but his seventh-round scare also brought up another frequently discussed part of his anatomy: his chin. Ortiz caught him good and Wilder was barely hanging on, no doubt. But he did hang on for 30 seconds of heavy-handed mayhem. Does this mean that his chin is weak, as many have suspected, or does it mean that Ortiz punches like a mofo and Wilder proved his whiskers by remaining conscious? It's similar to the talk around Joshua following his survive-and-stop win over Wladimir Klitschko. So it'll definitely be interesting if the twain should meet. As we went to press, Joshua had yet to do his part against Joseph Parker on March 31.

It took 10 rounds and surviving a near-disaster, but Deontay Wilder (left) eventually got his usual result.



Eight rounds of fighting with a broken jaw didn't deter Oscar Valdez (left) from retaining his title against Scott Quigg.

MIKEY GARCIA UD 12 SERGEY LIPINETS

(March 10, Freeman Coliseum, San Antonio, Texas)

Like every fighter on the pound-for-pound list, Mikey Garcia goes into each fight with a lot of scrutiny on his performance. He delivered again, this time in winning a title at junior welterweight (his fourth division, if you're counting), but it wasn't easy. Garcia's concentration is cold-blooded and his one-two is like a pair of vipers, but Lipinets took it all well and delivered his own clean punches behind effective pressure. A counter left hook in Round 7 put the Kazakhstani down for the first time in his career, but overall the performance left questions about how far up the scale Garcia's power could travel. It wasn't a concern after the fight for the Californian, who instead focused on the options he has, given that he still holds a title at 135 and sees himself able to handle 147 as well.

OSCAR VALDEZ UD 12 SCOTT QUIGG

(March 10, StubHub Center, Carson, Calif.)

This fight was like a 12-round art-house film. It began with the surreal image of rain soaking the outdoor arena as the fighters were carried to the ring under shielding tarps with plastics bags over their shoes, like recycled nobility. The downpour was merely foreshadowing, a motif that would continue with blood dousing the canvas. Water breaking to blood flowing. Birth to death? Boxing as a metaphor for life? Genius!

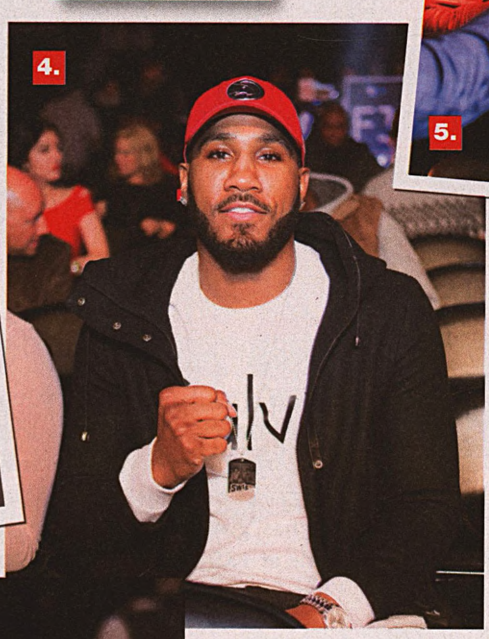
Whatever. Awesome, dramatic fight, though. Valdez came out with a stony face and a merciless body-attack, but by the fourth round his jaw was broken and the bleeding had commenced. Quigg (who weighed three pounds over and was therefore ineligible to win Valdez's WBO featherweight title), his eyebrow cut and his profile streamlined by a broken nose, dove in head-first. The exchanges were fast and brutal with both fighters landing clean shots, but one man simply did more and the scorecards told the tale: 118-110, 117-111 and 117-111 for Valdez.

Fin. RING

AT THE FIGHTS

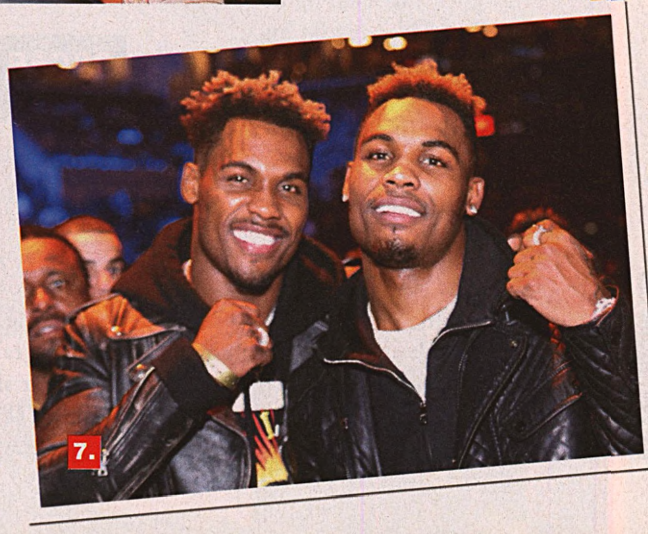
BY LAMAR CLARK

STYLES MAKE FIGHTS



Wilder vs. Ortiz, Barclays Center, Brooklyn, NY.: 1. Rapper Lil' Kim; 2. actor Denzel Washington; 3. welterweight contender Shawn Porter; 4. junior middleweight titleholder Jarrett Hurd; 5. fan and NY Giants wide receiver Brandon Marshall; 6. actor Liev Schreiber; 7. twin brothers Jermall (left) and Jermell Charlo.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE BARCLAYS CENTER



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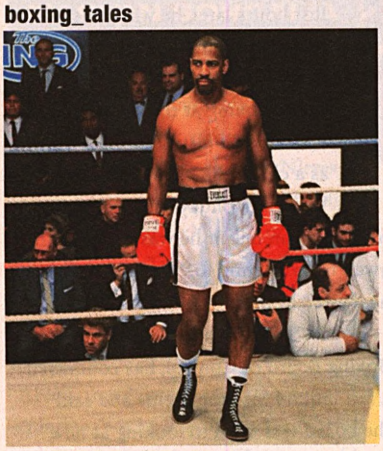

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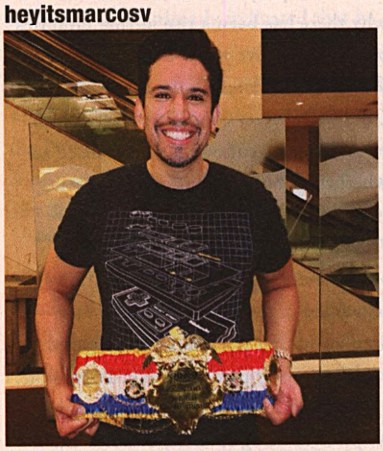

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WORLD BEAT

U.K.

BY GARETH A DAVIES

There were more than a few nerves and no lack of trepidation for Kell Brook in his comeback fight after two losses – and two fractured eye sockets – in his hometown of Sheffield in March, but the former welterweight titleholder ended opponent Sergey Rabchenko inside two rounds in his debut at 154 pounds. "I'm back," he roared at the crowd. It was an outpouring of relief after having been beaten up by Gennady Golovkin, up two weight divisions for a pot of gold, and having lost his IBF welterweight crown to Errol Spence Jr. in front of his adoring home crowd at Bramall Lane in May last year. Brook, who had admitted to a period of despair on the tail-end of those two defeats, looked rejuvenated and aggressive, into his groove early to land impressively against a man he got to know well in sparring. It was no less of a relief for the fighter who recovered, let us not forget, from a horrific machete attack on his leg in September 2014.

Confidence intact, Brook hunted his foe down, landing a ramrod right hand followed by a thumping right uppercut, and another right hand for good measure to complete the job on Rabchenko in the second stanza. The triumph certainly brought immediate interest across The Pond after Brook beat the Belarussian. Social media was buzzing: WBC ruler Jermell Charlo welcomed a possible clash; Spence called for a rematch at 154 if Brook could land a world crown. Brook himself said that his goal is to be a two-weight world titleholder – and that may be possible.

Eddie Hearn, Brook's promoter, revealed afterward that everything had been on the line. "If he'd lost the fight, it was all over. If he didn't look good, it was probably all over. If he'd been injured, it was probably all over. The way he dispatched Rabchenko with the sharpness and the combinations was great. Brook brings excitement every time he boxes. He was almost goaded into getting back to 147 pounds to defend his title against Spence after fighting Triple-G at 160. People were saying he was ducking Spence if he vacated, and he wouldn't do that. Take nothing from Errol Spence, but I believe Kell beats him at 154."

Kell Brook believes he has found new life at 154 pounds.

Not so sure. The truth is that Brook should just chase what he has wanted for several years: a fight – no, a showdown – with Amir Khan. It is long overdue, for both men. Brook is ill-advised, I believe, pursuing Spence at junior middleweight. I'm not sure there's a division in which Brook does beat Spence. Time will explain that one in due course.

★★★

Scott Westgarth, the 31-year-old light heavyweight, died just hours after his English title eliminator with Dec Spelman in Doncaster in the early hours of Sunday, March 18. It was a tragic night, and a very reflective week for the boxing community in the U.K.

The fatality was the third linked to boxing in five years in the U.K., following the deaths of Michael Norgrove in 2013 and Mike Towell in 2016. Westgarth, in his 10th contest, had earned a win on points over 10 tough rounds against Spelman and was knocked down on the ropes just before the bell for the end of the final round. The boxer from Northumberland looked uncomfortable during post-fight comments before he was taken ill, with images on social media showing him in distress.

In his ringside interview, Westgarth had said: "I do this for fun, not because I think I'm a world-class fighter. I'm glad we could put on a show and keep everyone entertained. It's a case of being able to take one to give one sometimes. I just do boxing because I enjoy it; that's the only reason I do it. I enjoy going to the gym with the lads and I train regardless – win, lose or draw." Haunting, really.

Reports suggest that Westgarth returned to his dressing room, fell ill and was then taken by ambulance to a nearby hospital. Just hours later, he was gone.

Tributes poured in from the boxing world for Westgarth, who began boxing at the age of 24, was a former ski instructor and worked as a chef at Sheffield's Royal Victoria Holiday Inn. His victory over Spelman meant he was one win away from fighting for the English light heavyweight title.

Robert Smith, secretary of the British Boxing Board of Control, has conducted a full inquiry into the events and said the board was open to looking at new ways of dealing with such tragedies. The BBBofC inquiry is bound to consider why there has been a rise in ring fatalities over the past five years when no fighters died in British rings in the preceding 18. Given that safety procedures have never been better, attention may be focused on whether there is a link to fighters being stronger, faster and fitter.

At a time when boxing is booming – there were 41 licensed boxing shows scheduled in the U.K. in March alone – Smith said that the board "is prepared to evolve to make boxing as safe as possible."

He added: "We are always looking at ways of making it safer, but it is hard to see a way of making boxing 100 percent safe."

John Westgarth, the 58-year-old father

RICHARD SELLERS/PA WIRE

of Scott who boxed 29 times as a professional heavyweight, sent out a moving tribute to his son just days after his passing: "I'm going to thank everyone for their condolences, which has been overwhelming for all the family. I can't get round to thanking you all personally at this moment, but I'm sure I will.

"Scott Westgarth, I'm going to miss you but I know that you are still here to talk to. We're going to look after your Natalie so don't worry son. I'm sorry for all the tears, I know what you would say 'MAN UP' - well maybe a little stronger than that. Rest my son I will see you again. Love you xx." RIP Scott Westgarth.

Gareth A Davies is boxing correspondent for the London Daily Telegraph.

PHILIPPINES

BY RYAN SONGALIA

It only took Donnie Nietes about a decade after winning his first world title to become an overnight success. The buzz that suddenly surrounds Nietes is a tribute to the potency of the "why didn't we think this earlier?" concept that is the HBO "Superfly" series and the crowd-pleasing manner in which he finished off Juan Carlos Reveco to retain his IBF flyweight title in March.

Now that Nietes has gotten people's attention, where does he go from here? The biggest fights he could take would be three pounds north at 115, and the 35-year-old has already indicated that he wants to be where the action is. "There are no doubts, I want to move up to 115," Nietes told reporters back home in the Philippines. His promoter, Michael Aldeguer, wants to pump the brakes on any decisions.

"We should know in a couple of weeks after we meet with his conditioning coach," Aldeguer said, referring to California-based Nick Curson.

Should he stay at 112, a unification fight with WBC titleholder Daigo Higa for the vacant RING championship would help his cause toward a Hall of Fame bid, while fights against Srisaket Sor Rungvisai, Juan Francisco Estrada or even a returning Roman Gonzalez would build his profile further in the United States.

Donnie Nietes (right) is finally poised for worldwide recognition.

★★★

Nietes isn't the only boxer from the ALA Gym considering moving up in weight. Milan Melindo, who lost his IBF junior flyweight belt in a unification bid against Ryoichi Taguchi on New Year's Eve, is pondering a return to 112 pounds, where he had previously failed in a bid for the two titles Estrada held in 2013.

★★★

The rise of Jerwin Ancajas has inspired two of his compatriots to attempt to recapture their own past glory and train alongside him at his "Survival Camp" compound in Cavite, Philippines.

Former WBO junior bantamweight titleholder Marvin Sonsona and title challenger AJ Banal have been working with Ancajas' trainer, Joven Jimenez, after being out of the ring for a combined five years. Banal, who had been a rising star out of the ALA Gym before falling short in two title fights, ended a two-year layoff to beat trial horse Jason Egera by split decision in December and is working his way down from lightweight to featherweight for his next fight on May 12.

Sonsona hasn't fought in nearly three years and had packed on a few pounds in the interim. His will to dedicate himself to being a successful prizefighter has been the greatest unknown, and it's something Jimenez wants Sonsona himself to clarify through his actions.

"That's the big question. He asked me to help him about his financial problems and also to train him," said Jimenez. "I will explain our rules in Survival Camp in a few days and we will see what is his reaction."

Sean Gibbons, the MP Promotions matchmaker who has orchestrated Ancajas' title reign, is "1,000 percent" convinced Sonsona, who is still just 27 years old, can once again win a title, but takes a "we'll see" view of Banal's odds.

★★★

Speaking of Ancajas, his fifth defense of the IBF junior bantamweight title was postponed after Terence Crawford, the headliner for the April 14 ESPN card, injured his hand in training for his challenge against WBO welterweight titleholder Jeff Horn.

Ancajas and mandatory Jonas Sultan are likely to meet in May or June when the Horn-Crawford fight is rescheduled, promoter Bob Arum told THE RING. It's been 93 years since two Filipinos contested for a world title, so what's a few more months?

Ancajas' team has adjusted his training schedule and isn't particularly bothered by the change in plans.

"That's part of the boxing life," said Jimenez, who remembers that Ancajas' title-winning match against McJoe Arroyo had been postponed and rescheduled three to four times before they got the fight in the ring.

★★★

Lastly, good on Kenny Demecillo, the hard-fighting brawler from Lanao del Norte who scored a fourth-round upset knockout of Vyacheslav Mirzaev in Russia on St. Patrick's Day. Demecillo is as fun a fighter as there is on the local Philippine scene, and having a win over a previously unbeaten prospect should earn him more opportunities abroad.

Ryan Songalia is a boxing correspondent for THE RING and can be reached at ryansongalia@gmail.com

BREAKING THE STREAK

In September 1975, Roberto Duran claimed a 10-round unanimous decision over Puerto Rican contender Edwin Viruet in a non-title bout in Uniondale, New York. The rematch (pictured here) took place in Philadelphia in September 1977 with the RING and WBA 135-pound belts at stake and would be Duran's penultimate lightweight title defense. "Hands of Stone" had stopped all 10 challengers for the belt he had held for almost five years, and he was arguably the finest pound-for-pound fighter in the world. However, Viruet became the first and only fighter to take him the 15-round distance in a lightweight championship bout.

COMING UP

APRIL

APRIL 15 – Daigo Higa vs. Cristofer Rosales, flyweights (for Higa's WBC title), Yokohama, Japan. Also, Ryota Murata vs. Emanuele Blandamura, middleweights.
APRIL 21 – Adrien Broner vs. Jessie Vargas, welterweights, Brooklyn, N.Y. (Showtime). Also, Jermall Charlo vs. Hugo Centeno Jr., middleweights; Gervonta Davis vs. Jesus Cuellar, junior lightweights (for vacant WBA title).
APRIL 21 – Carl Frampton vs. Nonito Donaire, featherweights, Belfast, Northern Ireland (BT Sport). Also, Zolani Tete vs. Omar Narvaez, bantamweights (for Tete's WBO title).
APRIL 28 – Daniel Jacobs vs. Maciej Sulecki, middleweights, Brooklyn, N.Y. (HBO). Also, Katie Taylor vs. Victoria Noelia Bustos, lightweights (for Taylor's WBA and Bustos' IBF titles); Jarrell Miller vs. Johann Duhaupas, heavyweights.
APRIL 28 – Jessie Magdaleno vs. Isaac Dogboe, junior featherweights (for Magdaleno's WBO title), Philadelphia (ESPN).

MAY

MAY 5 – Canelo Alvarez vs. Gennady Golovkin, middleweights (for Alvarez's RING and Golovkin's IBF/WBA/WBC titles), Las Vegas (HBO Pay-Per-View).
MAY 11 – Oleksandr Usyk vs. Murat Gassiev, cruiserweights (World Boxing Super Series final, for vacant RING, Usyk's WBC/WBO and Gassiev's IBF/WBA titles), Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.
MAY 12 – Jorge Linares vs. Vasyl Lomachenko, lightweights (for Linares' RING and WBA titles), New York (ESPN).
MAY 12 – Sadam Ali vs. Liam Smith, junior middleweights (for Ali's WBO title), Verona, New York (HBO).
MAY 19 – Adonis Stevenson vs. Badou Jack, light heavyweights (for Stevenson's WBC title), Montreal (Showtime).
MAY 19 – Lee Selby vs. Josh Warrington, featherweights (for Selby's IBF title), Leeds, England (BT Sport).
MAY 19 – Keith Thurman vs. TBA, welterweights (for Thurman's WBA title), Brooklyn, N.Y. (Showtime).
MAY 25 – Jamie McDonnell vs. Naoya Inoue, bantamweights, Tokyo. Also, Ken Shiro vs. Ganigan Lopez, junior flyweights (for Shiro's WBC title).

JUNE

JUNE 9 – Leo Santa Cruz vs. Abner Mares, featherweights (for Santa Cruz's WBA title), Los Angeles (Showtime). Also, Jermell Charlo vs. TBA, junior middleweights (for Charlo's WBC title).
JUNE 16 – Errol Spence Jr. vs. Carlos Ocampo, welterweights (for Spence's IBF title), Dallas (Showtime).

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